

CHRISTIAN COURIER

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60th Anniversary –
The way it was...p.6

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59th year of publication

The tsunami – seeing, reacting, helping, questioning, coping

Harry der Nederlanden

We watched those images of the ocean roaring in, just coming and coming as if the ocean had cast off its boundaries, again and again – like we watched the images of 9-11 in which the plane comes on each time again inexorably, unstoppable. As film footage became available, the pictures were shown on television at suppertime and bedtime, and we stopped whatever we were doing to watch the vast mass of ocean water rushing in, almost feeling the weight ourselves.

Now and again, the camera caught some tiny, frail figure standing mesmerized before the rising, onrushing wall of water simply awaiting its arrival, frozen not in fear, we sense, but in disbelief. Here and there some run a short way, then stop and turn, expecting the ocean to know its limits and withdraw, and then begin to run again. And then they are swallowed.

More often in those early images we saw surprisingly few people, in view of the shocking body count. What we looked at was rolling, swirling water coming on in such incredibly vast volumes that our minds were stunned by the overwhelming magnitude of its force. We realize that there's absolutely nothing that we puny beings can do or imagine to escape when nature crashes down on our cities and homes and families in such volume and with such force. It renders all our efforts futile, meaningless. We feel our fragility.

Later our television screens showed scenes in which the water was almost invisible. All we saw was a heaving, moving mass of smashed homes and furniture

ground up into flotsam and jetsam, a partly crushed automobile bobbing up and down on it all here and there like a pop can along the beach. After the seas retreated, there were the images of entire cities reduced to a vast trash heap, or, even more shocking, swept away cleanly, leaving a huge naked gash of wet earth with only a foundation here and there to show that a large, active community had once lived, loved, played here and called it home.

What struck me in the images of those first few days was the relative absence of people, living or dead, in the scenes captured by the eye of the camera. It was such an overwhelmingly large catastrophe that its scale almost obliterated the personal. That doubled the shock. The force of nature rendered even human suffering and death in the tens of thousands a little thing. The tsunami's implacable, almost lazy destruction of what human hearts and hands had built up over several lifetimes knocked the wind out of our ideologies, politics and theologies.

Only after the cameras stopped trying to convey pictures of the catastrophic natural event to focus instead on a mother stooping over bodies, turning back a shawl or sari now and then to expose a face as she looked for a missing child or children, only then did the human tragedy begin to sink in. Of course, we already knew before

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Kids playing on rubble

CSM PHOTO

that all that water was doing horrible things to human beings, but we didn't really begin to under-

stand until we heard a father tell us how he was swept out of his room holding his three-year-old

son, how he was pushed beneath the water, how he struggled to hold on with all his might, but.... And then he holds up the photograph.

They are still looking, hope against hope. A mother squats beside a row of bodies, her small hand reaching out again and again feebly toward the body closest to her. Grief has already carved itself deeply into her every feature and it cuts even more sharply, permanently inside.

Some journalists have lamented that it is the visibility of this tragedy that has brought such an outpouring of donations, because it casts other, equally devastating disasters in the shadows, but the television camera also works for

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ChaldoAssyrian Christians leave Iraq

Nina Shea & James Y. Rayis

Iraq's Christian minority is being driven out of its ancestral homeland by a wave of persecution as devastating as any tsunami. In less than four weeks, a pivotal election will take place in Iraq that represents this community's best hope for finding a secure home there, yet they find themselves marginalized and pushed aside in the electoral process – not only by their tormentors but, perhaps inadvertently, by the U.S. government. These Christians, who are both pro-Western and pro-democracy, need our help so that they can build a future in their native land with a modicum of security and freedom. Without it, they will leave, and U.S. Iraq policy will be dealt a setback so severe it may never recover.

Tens of thousands of Iraq's

nearly one million Chaldo-Assyrians, as this indigenous cultural and linguistic ethnic group is called under Iraq's Transitional Administrative Law, have fled into exile over the past few months. Their leaders fear that, like the Iraqi

Jews – who accounted for a third of Iraq's population until facing relentless persecution in the middle of the last century – they may leave en masse. Though many Iraqis, particularly moderates, suffer vio-

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Iraqi handing out Bibles

BP PHOTO

News

The tsunami *...continued from page 1*

good — to imprint upon our very eyes as it were our common humanity. It seems that seeing parents from the other side of the world, from a very different culture and religion, so stricken and grieving for lost sons and daughters ties us together more powerfully than any sermon or ideology. We feel our common humanity most strongly, it seems, when, like blinded King Lear, we are stripped down to our frail, helpless, stricken selves.

But although a catastrophe of such proportions might temporarily nudge us into a mindset beyond all differences, the event was rather quickly drawn back into the network of politics and economics as usual. The tragedy became another story to be exploited and explored from a variety of angles, another issue to be fought over, another event to be politicized and theologized.

As I write this, our newspapers are dwelling on the theme of aid. They are highlighting how fickle we are, quickly losing interest in countries affected by disasters like floods and earth-

quakes, and even reneging on promised aid. Officials of aid agencies are worrying about how the present generous outpouring of aid to the victims of the tsunami will affect donations for other more serious, less visible disasters.

Actually, aid was the focus of some of the first stories published about the tsunami. A day or so afterward, when the estimates of casualties were still around 15,000, Jan Egeland, the UN undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs, griped about how stingy some rich Western countries were in dishing out aid to the South. He clearly had in mind the initial American pledge of 15 million in aid, less than what it will cost to stage the Bush inaugural. All across America pundits weighed in on the theme: Is America stingy?

As the scope of the tragedy became more apparent, of course, pledges were quickly inflated, not just in the U.S. but in Canada and Europe as well. Their consciences pricked, Americans opened their purses and aid organizations were inundated with donations, and elsewhere governments and individuals vied with one another to demonstrate their compassion and generosity. It almost turned into a bidding war.

Politics entered the scene very early. Church leaders jumped on the catastrophe to urge us to take global warming seriously. A small rise in the level of the oceans, they claimed, would make such disasters much worse.

In the days immediately after the tragedy, Americans and Canadians both asked, Where are our leaders? Neither Martin nor Bush made themselves very visible and people wanted to see them express concern and mobilize action. Canada's DART, an expensive water purification unit, became a symbol of the government's lethargic reaction. It was the citizens, not the leaders who were mobilized first by the images coming from the Indian Ocean.

Much later government officials like Colin Powell, Kofi Anan, and Pierre Pettigrew, our Minister of Foreign Affairs could be seen on television strolling around with their retinues and local officials to tell us that it was the worst thing they had ever seen. Aid workers complained that officials commandeered badly needed he-

licopters and the necessary security interrupted the flow of supplies for extended periods of time. Martin planned to do the tour but it seems that wiser heads prevailed.

The newsmen and cameras arrived well ahead of most of the aid workers and the aid, so for a couple of days all we got was pictures of the devastation, mangled bodies, stunned, grieving people without food or drinking water, crowded hospitals and journalists asking, Where's the help? If it doesn't arrive soon, they warned, the death toll from disease will be larger than the death toll from the tsunami. Thank God, those predictions have not been borne out.

Then came stories of people, especially Western tourists, searching for missing loved ones. Parents flew in from the Scandinavian countries, Germany and the U.S. showing pictures, visiting hospitals and even combing the ruins, especially in Thailand, looking day after day, unwilling to give up hope. As help arrived and the stench of death became strong, paths through the debris became lined with body bags. Mass graves were dug. All the people we saw on television were wearing masks.

At the same time, we also heard remarkable stories. A woman who was rescued after floating out to sea clinging to a palm tree. A family, swept in different directions by the wave, miraculously reunited, the youngest found floating on a mattress two days later.

A sensational story made the rounds that children orphaned by the tsunami were being stalked by people looking to obtain children for the sex trade.

Meanwhile, people of different religions asked, Why? Even the most secular newspapers carried "God and tsunami" articles that either dismissed any idea of a sovereign God or that sought to exonerate him from complicity in the tragedy. Psychologists discussed how to deal with trauma and hard questions from children.

Gradually, discussions of the coordination, logistics and politics of aid, strategies of long-range reconstruction and cautions that even now there are ongoing disasters happening that are claiming many more lives than the tsunami are putting this catastrophe "in perspective." We have ab-

The Internet and aid

This disaster is hardly the first in which images brought into our homes by television have played a strong role in spurring us to help. Think of 9-11 and Kosovo.

But the first images we saw of the tsunami were not recorded by television cameras, but from the cameras of tourists visiting Thailand and Indonesia.

The Internet has also played a crucial role. For the first time agencies like UNICEF and the Red Cross as well as many private and religious aid agencies received millions in donations on their Websites. People were donating in such large numbers that some Websites crashed.

Catholic Relief Services said it collected more in a day than it nor-

mally collects all year, so its resources were overwhelmed. Doctors Without Frontiers soon announced it already had as much money as it could use.

The Internet also provides a convenient way for donors to learn which agencies have good ratings, and there are watchdogs that list how much of each agency's contributions go toward administration and fundraising. In Canada you could go online to see which agencies were receiving matching government grants.

The American Red Cross collected over half of its contributions (\$57 m) through its Website and Oxfam 80 percent (\$12 m). UNICEF raised \$20 m over the Internet.

Are Americans stingy?

It depends on how you count. In sheer dollar amounts, Americans have often given more humanitarian aid than any other country in the world.

As a percentage of national product, in giving official, planned foreign aid, the US is dead last, giving only .14 percent. Canada doesn't do much better at .26 percent. Compare this to some European and Scandinavian countries, which give between .7 and .9 percent of their revenues to third World development.

But the US is a different culture. Often private and corporate giving outstrips government aid. Yet, even adding these amounts

into the mix doesn't bring the per capita giving to development up to European levels.

The latest figures for tsunami aid as we went to press: Australia pledged \$810 m; Germany \$660 m; Japan \$500 m; the US \$350 m (private and corporate donations have brought that amount to almost \$700 m). Ottawa pledged \$80, but this amount got bumped up to \$425 m (spread out over five years) when the government pledged to match the donations of its citizens, who gave at least another \$150 m. Norway, with its pledge of \$200 m is the most generous per capita donor.

Competing for aid

About 25 million people have died of AIDS in Africa since the plague began, with over 3 m new infections every year. An estimated 6,500 die of AIDS every day in Africa alone.

Over 1 million people die every year from malaria, an easily treatable disease.

Perhaps an equal number, mostly children, die of diarrhea every year, largely due to lack of access to clean drinking water. Even more children die of mal-

nutrition — starvation.

Nearly 4 million, mostly civilians, have died in the civil war in the Congo (see previous issue of CC).

Sudan, too, has claimed millions of lives, some 50,000 in the recent "genocide" in Darfur, which has also driven 1.65 million from their homes.

None of these causes has been able to attract donations approximating the outpouring of aid for victims of the tsunami.

sorbed it into the ebb and tide of other events. But in the area where the big wave struck, many will

never again be able to look out to sea without experiencing that twinge of fear and grief.

Where are the Muslim countries?

Although there was plenty of print devoted to American stinginess, few asked, Where are the oil-rich Muslim nations among those offering help?

Indonesia, the country hardest hit is predominantly Muslim, and this is especially true of the area that suffered the worst devastation, Aceh.

Kuwait, which has benefited from the rise in oil prices to the tune of a \$10 billion surplus, pledged a paltry \$10 million. Initially, so did Saudi Arabia. Only after a public outcry and telethon, did it triple its pledge to \$30 m.

One explanation offered was that Muslims saw the disaster as punishment brought by Allah on the immoral vacation spots that cater to Westerners.

But there are good signs. The Muslim press is suggesting that it's alright if Muslim aid ends up helping non-Muslims. And some ten days after the disaster the Islamic Development Bank finally announced it would extend \$500 m in aid.

Politics

ChaldoAssyrian Christians leave Iraq...continued from page 1

lence, the ChaldoAssyrians, along with the smaller non-Muslim minorities of Sabeen Mandeans and Yezidis, may be as a group all but eradicated from Iraq. Their exodus began in earnest in August after the start of a terrorist bombing campaign against their churches. With additional church bombings right before Christmas, hundreds more Christian families escaped in fear to Jordan and Syria.

In the run up to elections, Sunni terrorists and insurgents have targeted the ChaldoAssyrians with particular ferocity, linking them to the West. The main Assyrian Christian news agency AINA.org reported last week that the kidnapping tally for Christians now ranges in the thousands, with ransom payments averaging \$100,000 each. One who could not afford the payment, 29-year-old Laith Antar Khanno, was found beheaded in Mosul on December 2, two weeks after his kidnapping. Cold-blooded assassinations of Christians are also on the rise. Prominent Assyrian surgeon and professor Ra'ad Augustine Qoryaqos was shot dead by three terrorists while making his rounds in a Ramadi clinic on December 8. That same week two other Christian businessmen from Baghdad, Fawzi Luqa and Haitham Saka, were abducted from work and murdered.

Both Sunni and Shiite extremists who seek to impose their codes of behavior have been ruthless toward the Christians, throwing acid in the faces of women without the hijab (veil) and gunning down the salesclerks at video and liquor stores. In the north, Kurdish administrators have withheld U.S. reconstruction funds from ChaldoAssyrian areas, and, together with local peshmerga forces, have confiscated some Christian farms and villages. Of the \$20 billion that American taxpayers generously provided for the reconstruction of Iraq two years ago, none so far has gone to rebuild ChaldoAssyrian communities. The State Department is distributing these funds exclusively to the Arab- and Kurdish-run governorates – the old Saddam Hussein power structure – who fail to pass on the ChaldoAssyrian share.

Though Iraq's president, prime minister, and Grand Ayatollah Sistani have all denounced the attacks against the Christians, the

persecution has not abated. The ChaldoAssyrians have endured much throughout the last century in Iraq, including brutal Arabization and Islamization campaigns. But this current period may see their last stand as a cohesive community.

Should the ChaldoAssyrian community disappear from Iraq, it would mean the end of their Aramaic language (spoken by Jesus), and their customs, rites, and culture. A unique part of Christian patrimony would disappear along with this first-century church. The United States would have presided over the destruction of one of the world's oldest Christian communities. Its reverberations would be keenly felt just beyond Iraq's borders. As Christian scholar Habib Malik wrote last month in the daily press of his native Lebanon, if the democratic project of Iraq ends in dismal failure for the ChaldoAssyrians, the future will be bleak for all the historic churches of the Middle East.

Further loss of ChaldoAssyrian influence in Iraq would also have dire implications for Iraq itself and for American policy. The ChaldoAssyrians are a disproportionately skilled and educated group, and they also possess that increasingly scarce trait in the Middle East: the virtue of tolerance. They are a natural political bloc for building a democracy with minority protections and individual rights. Their presence bolsters Muslim moderates who claim religious pluralism as a rationale for staving off governance by Islamic sharia law.

The ChaldoAssyrians who continue to tough it out in Iraq do so desperately clinging to the hope that liberal democracy will take root there. They and their communities in the American diaspora, numbering around 450,000, are stirring with activity in preparation for the elections at the end of January. These elections will choose a National Assembly that will draft the country's permanent constitution. They are eager to see individual rights to religious freedom and all fundamental freedoms carried over from the interim constitution into the permanent government.

It is in the direct political interest of the United States to keep the ChaldoAssyrians in Iraq and ensure they have a voice in the political process unfolding over

the next year. Yet U.S. policy toward Iraq's valuable ChaldoAssyrian allies seems to be one of utter indifference.

While Iraq's hard-line Shiite parties are heavily financed by Iran, Kurdish leaders have long been bankrolled by the U.S., and Sunni insurgents are funded by Syria, the pro-democracy ChaldoAssyrians have no sponsors. The U.S. policy of providing democracy-building funds to political parties in emerging democracies, made legendary with Solidarity in Poland, ended a decade ago. The U.S. government is taking steps to compensate one religious minority that might fare poorly in the election. According to press reports, the U.S. administration has called for assembly seats to be set aside for the Sunni minority, which is boycotting the elections after warnings by extremist Sunni leaders. But no provisions have been made for ChaldoAssyrian Christians, who, unlike many insurgent Sunnis, work for the Coalition rather than build roadside bombs against it.

In short, ChaldoAssyrian candidates and parties are alone and without funds. If these Christians fail to win seats in the assembly, they will have no direct say in the critical drafting of the country's permanent constitution. Don't expect the United States to speak up for them – or for other moderates.

The same lackadaisical approach to individual and minority rights is shown in America's approach to the drafting of Iraq's permanent constitution, where it has adopted de facto a policy of strict neutrality. The State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development are funding programs to provide outside legal and expert advice to assist in this drafting. These "independent" contractors are not supposed to exert any influence to ensure constitutional protections for individual rights to religious freedom, women's equality, or any other basic human right. As one such U.S.-funded advisor explained in an L.A. Times op-ed last month: "Outsiders should not ... seek to prevent Shiite parties from advancing models for an Islamic republic." The only such existent model, of course, is the Islamic Republic of Iran – a country so devoid of individual human rights that its dissidents are sentenced to death for blasphemy, the "crime

of thinking," and whose governing ideology is explicitly hostile to American interests.

The rationale for this is that the focus should be on "process," not on "imposing values" – that is they are not concerned about the outcome, only how it is achieved. A lesson of apartheid South Africa is that the rule of law only goes so far in providing for a fair and humane society. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent federal agency, wrote an urgent letter on Iraq's religious minorities to President Bush last month, protesting this approach and recommending that the administration "give clear directives to American officials and recipients of U.S. democracy-building grants" to advocate the inclusion of religious freedom and other fundamental human rights in the permanent constitution.

Over 1,300 American soldiers have given their lives so far in Iraq. We owe it to them and to Iraqis – many of whom have also paid with their lives supporting the Coalition – to take our policy goal of democratizing Iraq seriously. One way is to level the playing field in the po-

litical arena for the ChaldoAssyrian community. We should be helping all candidates whose political ideology is based on an acceptance of liberal democracy and individual religious freedom and other fundamental human rights – even if they are Christian.

There is an urgent need for immediate private funding to help pro-democracy ChaldoAssyrian candidates and voters in the January 30 elections. The private response to southeast Asia's tsunami victims proves that concerned individuals can make a critical difference. Only a small fraction of that generous outpouring is needed to keep the ChaldoAssyrians politically competitive – through voter education, candidate spots on television and radio, campaign literature, get-out-the-vote efforts, and other election essentials. Tax-deductible donations for this purpose can be sent to: Iraq Freedom Account, Assyrian American National Federation, 5550 North Ashland, Chicago, IL 60640.

Nina Shea is the director of Freedom House's Center for Religious Freedom. James Y. Rayis, an Atlanta lawyer, is vice chair of the Chicago-based ChaldoAssyrian American Advocacy Council.

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Editorial

Where was God?

Harry der Nederlanden

Being neither pastor nor theologian, I venture with some trepidation into the domain of theodicy, that is, "explaining the – harsh – ways of God to men." (Blessings require no such explanation.) Evil demands explanation in a world ruled by a good God. But evil, whether human or natural, stubbornly resists our efforts to comprehend it as part of the "whole counsel of God," to use a phrase from our forefathers. I should simply point to our first installment of a series by A.A. van Ruler on Ecclesiastes (p.15), which has some robust things to say about faith, and to the article by the well-known Baptist apologist, Albert Mohler (p.10).

However, I had planned to include an article in this issue with some quotes to illustrate what people were saying about religion and the tsunami, but we ran out of space. So I'll do a bit of that here. Over the past year religion was very much in the news, so editors all across the continent could not resist the topic. Quite a few couldn't resist taking aim at the faith of the infamous evangelicals who elected George Bush. Many assumed they had the tsunami on their side – a force that sweeps away that fundamentalist God as effectively as it swept away those thousands of people.

On Jan. 7 CNN's "Larry King Live" asked six religious leaders how they would address the question of the relationship between God and the tsunami.

Jewish rabbi Michael Lerner rejected the traditional Christian concept of God as an all-powerful personal being. In adapting to a changing world, he said, liberal Jews envision God as a "force" who is evolving along with creation and humanity.

"I think that the older conception of God as a big guy up in heaven shaping and controlling everything has to be replaced," he said. God is not "up in heaven throwing down punishments and judgments." Lerner prefers to think of God as "the force of healing," who does not, however, govern or control everything that happens in the universe.

New Age author Deepak Chopra envisions a God similar to that of Lerner. To see disasters as punishment for sin is a "very primitive" idea that belongs to the past. Our concept of God must change as we evolve, he said.

"One of the very interesting things that happened with this tsunami was that no animal died," he observed. "[Animals] are so tuned in to the forces of nature that they escaped. We have lost that connection."

Chopra suggested that we must learn compassion and also how to "reconnect" with nature like the animals.

Dr. Maher Hathout, a Muslim Scholar, said that from an Islamic perspective, "this place, planet Earth, is not a place for accomplishment or for settling accounts. This is a place for testing."

We must not question God; it is he who is questioning us – how we deal with "faults in the system."

"The ultimate justice is in the hereafter," he said, "based on how we react to such a calamity and deal with the victims."

Buddhist monk Henepola Gunaratana pointed out that Buddhists do not believe in a personal God but in a "universal force" called "eternal law." Everything that happens on earth is, thus, merely a series of unchangeable causes and effects that are part of nature. Therefore, the suffering brought by the tsunami is merely part of the cycle of nature, he said.

"This [suffering] is part of nature, that things come into existence and are going out of existence in one way or another," he said. "And this is one of those ways that things go out of existence."

I summarize the positions of the non-Christians in the discussion to highlight one thing they have in common: none of them allow us to cry out in protest, to insist that this is not the way the world ought to be. They deprive us of a voice and a claim, a claim to a world in which we belong and with which we can live in harmony. The Scriptures give us a voice with which to lament and hold God to his word that this world is good and that he desires our good.

John O'Sullivan, editor at large of the *National Review*, points out: "Buddhists, Muslims, and Hindus who were the tsunami's main victims in Asia are unlikely to [rage against God]. These faiths all stress – in very different ways – submission and acceptance of life's inevitable tragedies. But Christians have always been anguished by the question of impersonal evil."

Many people in the West, even Christians, have embraced similar views. Harold Kushner in *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* argues that God does not cause the miseries brought on by illness and natural disasters and accidents, and he is powerless to prevent them. "These events do not reflect God's choices," he wrote. "They happen at random, and randomness is another name for chaos.... And chaos is evil...because by causing tragedies at random, it prevents people from believing in God's goodness."

"Tsunamis happen, and for no reason at all. There is no divine calculus at work; there is simply bad luck. And so there is no reason to think hard thoughts about God when tragedy strikes."

This may sound edifying, absolving God of complicity in natural disasters and diseases. But it robs us of the biblical assurance that God cares not only about what happens to us in some other realm outside of or beyond this earthly existence but also in the here and now.

Jeff Jacoby, writing in the *Boston Globe*, asks: "What is so bad about being angry with God? Why shouldn't we challenge him to make sense of the injustice and cruelty that he himself has taught us to hate? Isn't it better to angrily question a God in whose universe we are sure nothing

happens without a reason, than to resign ourselves to a weakling God who can do nothing about a world that kills and lays waste at random?"

"To wrestle with God is not to abandon him. To protest against the unearned suffering he inflicts or permits is not to reject his message – quite the opposite."

Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a participant in the "Larry King Live" exchange, pointed out that grief and death are the results of a world that is fallen and held captive by sin. However, he warned against attempting to discern God's purposes in tragic events. The Bible gives believers no warrant to view the tsunami as an expression of God's judgment on particular people for particular sins, he said.

David Hart, writing in the *Wall Street Journal*, went further: "No Christian is licensed to utter odious banalities about God's inscrutable counsels or blasphemous suggestions that all this mysteriously serves God's good ends."

John Piper, a Calvinist, took issue with Hart: "The Christian Scriptures do indeed license us to speak of God's 'inscrutable counsels' and how he works in all things for mysterious good ends...."

"Every deadly calamity is a merciful call from God for the living to repent. 'Weep with those who weep,' the Bible says. Yes, but let us also weep for our own rebellion against the living God. Lesson one: weep for the dead. Lesson two: weep for yourselves."

As I understand Scripture, natural disasters are indeed somehow bound up with the weight of sin and judgment on the earth, although they don't have a specific target. The fact that creation suffers in solidarity with us, also groaning to be released from sin's bondage is a wonderful thought. We must not let go of it. We are meant to live in harmony with this our earthly home as well as with God and one another.

Although floods and other disasters still devastate our planet and bring death, even after God gave Noah the rainbow sign, we no longer need see them as punishment upon sin. Here the sacrament of baptism is a powerful witness, I believe. Baptism reminds us of the flood and of God's covenant. The new head of the covenant is our Redeemer Jesus Christ. At the beginning of his ministry, he underwent baptism, a symbolic act of drowning. Jesus allowed the flood as judgment, the angry waters, to wash over him.

That happened symbolically in the Jordan River, but it happened actually on the cross. The most horrific tsunami of all bore him down into the depths. All the weight of sin and judgment, the vast weight of human grief and suffering hammered down on him. But God raised him up, like Jonah, from the depths. In him we are all mermen and mermaids rising new from the ocean.

Hereafter, no flood or disaster need be freighted with the primal terror that it is God visiting his wrath and punishment on us, or that nature has turned against us, for Christ already bore all that and took it away. In him all things in heaven and earth are reconciled. He arose, as the first of God's new humanity, from the grave and from the flood, and he is the harbinger of a new heaven and a new earth in which there is no sea and the only waves are ripples in the river of life that flows forever from the throne of God and the Lamb.

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Letters

Military spending and children

There are countless people who argue in favor of increased spending on military equipment. Even the editor of *CC* joined the debate whether or not Canada should participate in the creation of the missile shield (*CC* 20 December 2004). Those favoring participation would do well to read American president Eisenhower's speech that he gave on April 16, 1953 before the American Society of Newspaper Editors. Allow me to quote from that speech, by some regarded as the best speech of his life.

"Every gun that is fired, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. The world in arms is not spending

money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children.... We pay for a single destroyer with new homes that could have housed more than eight thousand people.... This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron."

Coming from a general these words are quite remarkable. The leaders of the world, be they Bush, Putin, Martin, Castro and the few hundred or so others, would do well to keep these words in mind. And on a much lower level, so should the Antonidesees of the world.

Bert den Boggende,
Brooks, Alberta

Can we have a referendum on same-sex 'marriage'? Should we?

Ron Gray

Referenda are rare in Canada; only three have been held at the Federal level in 137 years. The most recent was the Charlottetown Accord referendum in 1992, which was defeated. Various analysts differ as to why it was defeated. Some think it was because concessions to Quebec were considered excessive by English Canada. Others think the electorate was offended by the Accord's failure to recognize the legitimate interests and rights of Aboriginal Canadians. (I hold to the latter view.)

Now we have voices proposing a referendum on same-sex 'marriage'. Two widely-divergent groups speak out against the idea:

— The homosexual lobby opposes a referendum, because they know they'd probably lose.

— Many Bible-believing Christians oppose a referendum, because they cannot accept that 50 percent+1 can make what is evil become 'good'. And although traditional marriage might win today, we'd have established a precedent that could put all moral principles up for public review. Ultimately, that would work against the cause of public morality, for the advocates of immorality would merely continue, again and again, until they attained their illicit ends.

Pragmatists say, "Grab a victory while you can." These include hyper-democrats who think that the people are the fount of national sovereignty. They are wrong: all authority derives from God. In a true democracy, his standards are the ones to which the people must hold the government and the courts accountable.

But neither the courts, nor Parliament, nor the public has the authority to change the definition of 'marriage'. Marriage and civil government were both ordained by

God, and he has set their definitions. He defined marriage long before he established civil government, and he never set civil government over marriage. Government has a duty to protect marriage, but not the authority to change it.

What Parliament and/or a referendum can do is decide whether we, as a people, choose to be obedient to revealed truth; but that decision should not be attempted until there's been extensive public discussion to make clear to voters the probable consequences of willful national disobedience. And that's where the churches and the media have a clear duty in the public square — one which the churches have just begun to take up, and which the media have assiduously avoided.

Canada is a blessed nation: founded, as our Constitution asserts, on principles that recognize the supremacy of God, we have enjoyed peace and prosperity unequalled in human history. Unlike the United States (which admittedly has prospered more than we have), Canada has never experienced war on our own soil.

But in the past half-century or more, we've turned our backs on God — and we've seen some of his blessings withdrawn. We've spurned his gift of life; we've seen our birth-rate plummet to below replacement level. We have not cared for his creation; we've seen natural catastrophes multiply. If we continue in willful disobedience, we invite judgement. The churches have a duty to tell Canadians what that might be like, before we allow them to continue along the path of willful disobedience.

It wouldn't be pretty.

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Let's call a spade a spade.

Mr. Harry Antonides is of the opinion that the reporting in the *National Post* where people who kill themselves (suicide bombers) are referred to as terrorists is correct and that a complaint about it by the Arab Federation is unfounded.

However, I believe the A.F. is right to complain.

Neil MacDonald in "Viewpoint" zeroed in on a part of a report which stated: "People under foreign occupation have a right to resistance and a definition of terrorism should not override this right." He then said: "The Israeli soldiers who enforce the occupation kill a great many Palestinian civilians. If Palestinians have committed terror, the Israelis have certainly committed war crimes."

Neil MacDonald has been a thorn in the flesh of Israeli proponents during the 2 years he was stationed in Israel and reported first hand. Paul Michels, in the *Canadian Jewish News* writes: "It is time for an independent inquiry into why MacDonald has been

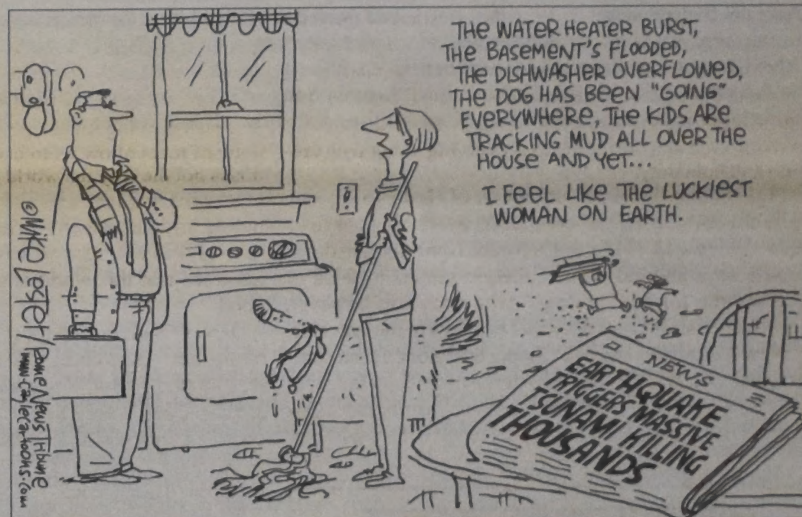
allowed to parade his personal opinions on the publicly funded CBC, in defiance of the broadcaster's own policy." Also in the *Can Jewish News* of Jan 5: "CBC should drop MacDonald because he is anti-Israel," said HonestReporting.com, "and he displayed pro-Palestinian bias when he was Mid-east Correspondent for CBC Television."....

These complaints are on the one side. The *Can Jewish News* (Dec. 3, 2004) reported that a keynote speaker at a Christian College said: "Israel should annex the West Bank with Gaza and transfer the inhabitants to neighboring Arab countries." No wonder they feel threatened and resort to such drastic measures.

Israeli 'occupiers' are called 'settlers' and Palestinian 'defenders' are called 'terrorists.'

We are home safe in Canada and MacDonald was in the fray for 2 years and I remember occupation in Holland. Let's call a spade a spade.

Jerry Stehouwer
Richmond Hill, ON



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60th Anniversary

The way it was



"At last here we are at our destination": This photo, which appeared on the cover of the Sept. 1950 issue of *Contact*, was taken at the train station of the CNR at Brockville, Ontario. In the foreground Luke Vanden Berg, fieldman, and John Vander Vliet, secretary of the Immigration Committee meet a trainload of new immigrants from the Netherlands.

Harry der Nederlanden

This year we mark the 60th year that *CC* in its several identities has been serving the Reformed, primarily the Christian Reformed, community in Canada. Part of our celebration will be to look back to previous issues and recall what was being said in those early years, moving gradually closer to the present. We're not interested so much in attempting to trace a history as simply to remember, indulging also perhaps in a bit of nostalgia.

We invite readers, especially our long-time readers, some of whom have told us that they've been reading *CC* for 50 years, to send us your reminiscences as well, however brief. Perhaps we can add them to this "Retrospective" page.

The first printed copy of the *CC* fore-runner, *The Canadian Calvinist*, dated Feb. 15, 1946, told readers that its birth was welcomed by the editors of both *De Wachter* and *The Banner*. And its editor, Rev. Paul De Koekoek, thanks a minister in Grand Rapids for donating \$100 to make the printing possible. The churches in Hamilton and Winnipeg sent contributions as did the Ladies Aid in Lacombe, Alberta.

De Koekoek said the goals of *CC* were to keep Canadian Calvinists in touch with each other, to direct immigrants, and to put forth "a strenuous effort" to mobilize all in a "sound witness in the several spheres of Canada's life."

The same issue reports that a group met in the Reformed Church of Monarch, Alberta on Feb. 11 to discuss the establishment of a Christian school. De Koekoek traveled from Edmonton to give an inspirational message on Christian education. The creation of a special fund to support those who want to become teachers was also discussed.

The North Alberta League of Reformed Young People's Societies was in the process of creating a theme song. This one

was printed in *CC*, but I don't know whether it was adopted.

League Song

Young People of Alberta, come,
As daughters fair and gallant sons;
Let us in faith together stand
With Christ as Captain of our band.

Refrain:

Canadians true we'll always be
If we in Christ our Leader see!

Alberta's League we're proud to say,
Reformed must be in ev'ry way.
Its aim, "The glory of His name,"
Forever shall remain the same!

Now may we put in God our trust,
And may He bless each one of us;
Yea, may we clasp His guiding hand
Which leads us to th' eternal land.

Composed by Lily Messelink and Clara Visser.
Tune: *The Solid Rock*, PH 302

Previous issues of *The Canadian Calvinist* had been run off on a Gestetner machine on 8 1/2 x 11 newsprint. Not many issues survived. Our archives yield only four of them.

The sheet for Jan. 1946 relates that members of the CRC in Canada sent aid to the Netherlands, just emerging from the War. "There are some congregations," wrote the editor, "who have contributed as much as \$1000 or more."

The churches in Edmonton announced a drive to raise enough money to buy three city lots suitable for building a Christian school.

The first issue of *Contact*, the Ontario equivalent of *CC*, is dated August 1949. It carries a one cent King George stamp. A long article, continued in following issues, describes plans to coordinate the arrival of

some 10,000 immigrants expected to arrive from Holland in 1950. The plan involves contacting Canadian farmers to sponsor good Calvinistic families and to place them near a CRC, where they can pitch in to build up church and school.

A news page reports that the Sarnia congregation has outgrown its church building due to the influx of immigrants. Around London, as many as 90 Dutch immigrants met in the Presbyterian

Church of Ilderton, just north of London, but they had not yet organized themselves as a church.

The immigrant community in St. Catharines boasted that they had already raised most of the \$2000 needed to buy land in this expensive area (because it is so close to Niagara Falls) to build a church. [Things haven't changed much in St. Catharines; we still like to brag.]

The second issue of *Contact*, funded by the Christian Reformed Immigration Societies in Eastern Canada, responds to charges by De Koekoek that it poses competition with his *Canadian Calvinist*. De Koekoek complained about needless duplication and worried about dividing the community into east and west. In reply, the editor of *Con-*

tact (John Gritter?) pointed out that, among other things, the goals of the two publications were different. While the *Canadian Calvinist* was devoted primarily to the Kuyperian vision of giving "a common witness of Canadians of the Reformed faith and life," *Contact* was primarily devoted to serving the practical needs of the new immigrants, so every issue was packed with practical information about soil and climate in different parts of Ontario, crops and cattle, availability of farms, financing and advice not to be in too much of a hurry to start on your own but to serve your sponsor faithfully, to learn and to wait for a good opportunity.

In the same issue P.C. Elferich, in an article written in mid-Atlantic after a visit to Canada, concludes that though Canada is a beautiful country, it is not suitable for immigration. It is a very harsh land he says. Still, he admits, for those ready to work hard and to suffer hardships, there are possibilities. But be prepared to sacrifice most of the joys and comforts of family life.

A couple of issues later, there are signs that indeed working for a Canadian farmer tested some of the immigrants to the breaking point. One of the fieldman, J. Vander Vliet, complains that too many are appearing on his doorstep without notification having left their sponsor, demanding a new job and a place to live. He warns that jobs in town are scarce and he cannot suddenly provide work and housing for those dissatisfied with their situation.

My memory of those early days as a first and second grader was that when the Dutch immigrants got together there was a lot of laughter, but there must also have been a lot of homesickness and tears. Many undoubtedly learned to pray with a new intensity.



"Goals achieved": This photo of the cattle belonging to a proud Dutch farmer in Canada, which appeared on the Jan. 1951 issue of *Contact*, captures the destination most of the new immigrants to Canada were dreaming of. Every early issue of *Contact* was stuffed with information about land, the availability of farms, crops, financing and advice not to be too eager about beginning on your own—be patient, serve your sponsor well, learn and wait for the right opportunity.

60th Anniversary

Hey, Dutchie, the rich soil of Peers, Alberta, is calling you



Harry der Nederlanden

In the *Canadian Calvinist* of Sept. 1950, fieldman H.A. Wieringa waxed eloquent about the land around Edmonton, where "the golden yellow heads of grain reflect the prosperousness of city and country" and where treasures buried deep beneath the ground for centuries are being brought to the surface. That's right. Alberta oil.

Yes, the land around Edmonton has been farmed for several decades already, says Wieringa, and the first Dutch settlers had to go about 90 miles to the north — to Neerlandia, where they turned a wilderness into a paradise. [My family landed in Neerlandia in 1951, and I can honestly confirm the claim that Neerlandia was indeed a paradise then, at least to a six-year-old kid. My father, however, after catching his breath, promptly headed for Edmonton to find work there.]

Nowadays, says Wieringa, the quest is not for a large tract of land for a large group. Today's Dutch immigrants are not looking to start a colony: "We have now more or less outgrown the era of isolation, but we still want to settle in a way that will enable us to develop strong churches." To that end, he points to opportunities west of Edmonton and south of Lacombe.

He points to Edson and Wildwood, then with 2000 and 500 inhabitants each, where there are still crown lands available as well as a number of farms that have been partly cultivated.

"This area is admirably suited for mixed farming," writes Wieringa. "There's plenty of arable land, the roads are good, and the main line of the CNR runs right through the middle of it. The highway from Edmonton has been paved for 70 miles, and road crews are busy turning the entire road into one of the best in all of Alberta all the way to Jasper Park.

The farms are cheap. "I have in mind, for example, a place of 310 acres, 80 acres cleared, with buildings and it's right along the railroad. For \$3,000! Another adjoining 160 acres are available for rent. [Wieringa was a good promoter.]

If you want to become a potato farmer, he suggests, the McCloud River valley is ideal. Especially near Peers, Alberta, there are a lot of potato farmers. But valley land is a bit more expensive. A 160 acre farm with 100 acres under cultivation and buildings will cost some \$5,500. He adds that buyers are even coming from Saskatchewan.

Wieringa already envisions an unbroken chain of CRC churches springing up "from MacKay, Niton, Carol Creek, Peers, Wolf Creek and Edson" all across northern Alberta. He wasn't just caught up in the nitty-gritty of addressing the hundreds of practical needs of the immigrants; he was also dealing in dreams and visions.

Alberta is a great place to settle, he declares. It's the only province in which the Premier is on the radio every Sunday preaching the Word of God.

The elder Manning was a permanent fixture on my horizon as I grew up in Alberta. When I was in high school, our young people even went to hear him preach in a nearby Baptist church one Sunday evening. And when, after two years of Dordt College, I was working for Alberta Government Telephones, I even got to vote him into office one more time.

I recall my father talking about Wieringa during those early years with great respect. Wieringa even had my father, city born and bred, dreaming of homesteading the Alberta wilderness. Fortunately, it was never more than a dream. Years later, the idea made him shudder.

From the *Canadian Calvinist*, December, 1950

CHURCH MATTERS A HISTORIC CLASSICAL MEETING

When these lines will reach our readers, the first meeting of the first Canadian classis of the Christian Reformed Church will be history. Classis Ontario is scheduled to meet at Hamilton, Ont., December 6.

For some forty years individual congregations of our denomination in Canada maintained contact on the classical level across the Canada-U.S.A. border. Delegates of churches, few in number and spread thinly over the wide expanse of Canada's vast territory, conducted their broader church business "down South." As far as we know, no classical meeting of our church was ever held on Canadian soil.

Our Yearbook 1910 lists two Canadian churches. In 1920 there were nine, but this number went down to five in 1930. In 1940 the number increased to 12, and the yearbook 1950 informs us that the Chr. Ref. congregations in Canada number 29.

The following issue will, D.V., report that the number stands at 40 or more. As late as five years ago, only 13 churches were extant in Canada, and their membership stood at some 600 families. The lines of their connections ran North and South, and these lines were thin as well as long.

From the Northern end of these lines, reports came of a people sturdy, but joined in small bands. We in the States knew little more of them than the general direction of their geographic location, and perhaps also that they were of such modest material means, that we, with sympathetic indulgence wished that these brethren might have the good fortune of living in the United States also. Those of the North, however stayed in the North, developed their material holdings, put their ecclesiastical house in order, and moved pretty well on the way to sound and full-orbed church life.

As to numerical growth, it evidently was largely from within, and accordingly rather slow. Few new additions came from across the ocean, and fewer still from the States. It seemed certain that it would take years or perhaps decades for the Canadian churches to become a substantial part of the Christian Reformed denomination across the border.



Yes, for this sort of slow development the stage appeared definitely set until the new immigration of recent years set in and changed it all! Thousands (but not the ten thousands of inflated estimates) of brethren of our faith came to cast their lot with Canada and our church. These thousands almost overwhelmed the hundreds of the existing congregations. What a gain for these churches! Yes, and what a challenge for them also!

Perhaps few realize what it meant to them to receive, direct and (in a measure) absorb so many newcomers in so short a time. Nevertheless, the task was undertaken, and with the liberal help of denominational dollars and men, is still in progress and we believe, with a considerable measure of success. By the Lord's blessing the Canadian churches have grown rapidly.

Those who came from abroad to enlarge our denominational fellowship were not recent converts, but seasoned men and women of the Reformed faith. While they needed initial orientation in our language and congregational customs and denominational policies, (and oftentimes clearly expressed their appreciation of assistance given in these things by the "elder brethren" here) they soon took an active part in their congregational affairs. This in turn suggested the need and propriety of having Canadian classes wherever this was feasible.

Ontario with its dozens of congregations sought and received the classical status, soon to be followed by a Classis Alberta, we trust. Ecclesiastical life moved fast, and in the main, in the right direction. The first classis in Ontario and Canada meeting at Hamilton, December 6, 1950.

Who would have thought of that a few years ago?

Our congratulations to Classis Ontario! The Church of God is marching on, in and through you also. May your way be plain, your work energetic, your counsels Scripture-based, your decisions wise, and your spirit that of Christian love. May the Kingdom of God come to ever clearer expression through your united prayers and good work.

And may you thereto be soon joined by many others of sound faith and corresponding practice.

P.D.K.

The last meeting of Classis Pacific that included the 15 churches of Alberta met in October of 1951. The next year Alberta formed its own classis.

Church

India's Dalit Christians demand equal rights

"Untouchables" lose basic rights if they convert to Christianity.

Satya Kumar

DELHI, January 10 (Compass) — India's Supreme Court has asked the federal government why an employment quota system for Dalits is withheld from those who convert to Christianity.

Under India's caste system, certain quotas are reserved for members of the lower or Scheduled Castes, commonly called Dalits. The term Dalit literally means "broken people."

The Supreme Court's notice came at the end of a drawn-out legal battle spanning many years of litigation, public campaigns and representations by India's Christian minorities who are seeking equal access to the government employment scheme.

About 26 percent of government jobs in India are reserved for members of Scheduled Castes, with the aim of bringing them into the political and social mainstream.

Currently, Dalits who convert to Christianity are not entitled to jobs under this plan.

The court expects a response from the government before the end of January.

Initially, Dalits converting to other religions such as Sikhism or Buddhism were also excluded. However, the government recently amended the law to provide a job quota for Dalit Sikhs and Buddhists.

"Only the Christian community is now excluded," said senior advocate Shanti Bhushan, representing the Centre for Public Interest Litigation, which has filed a petition in the Supreme Court.

"I think we have a very strong case because the social and economic status of any person does not change when they change their religion," Bhushan told Compass.

Bhushan said he expected opposition to the campaign. "The Hindu nationalists could oppose it. But let's see."

Over the past six years, Hindu nationalist groups such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh have orchestrated campaigns against

Christian missionaries, and against Dalits and Tribals who have converted to Christianity, particularly in the south and east of India.

Immediately after the Supreme Court's initial order seeking an explanation from the government, several Christian leaders from the All India Catholic Union sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and Congress party leader, Sonia Gandhi — who is herself a Christian.

In the memorandum, the leaders called upon the government to restore "human dignity and equality" to Dalit Christians. They also said the government now had a "window of opportunity" to help the Dalit Christian community by undoing a "historic injustice."

"The founding fathers of the Indian Constitution ... enacted the law without reference to their current religions," the memo added. Conditions have since changed, meaning new provisions are needed to end double discrimination on the grounds of religion as well as caste.

Quota rights were initially denied to Christians on the grounds that Christianity does not discriminate between castes. However, this ignores the fact that all Indians, regardless of religious background, live in a society bound by centuries of caste tradition.

In 1996, the former Congress Party government brought a bill before parliament to change this legal anomaly, but the government collapsed before the bill could be passed.

The failed bill noted that, "Demands have been made from time to time for extending these benefits and safeguards to Chris-

tians of Scheduled Caste origin by granting them recognition as Scheduled Castes on the grounds that the change of religion has not altered their social and economic condition."

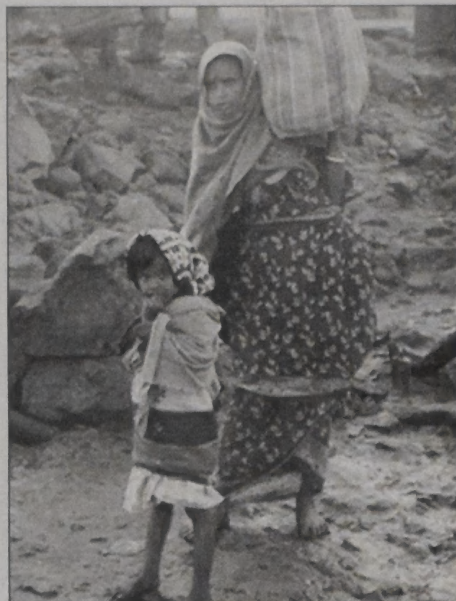
In other words, Dalit and Tribal Christians should be awarded the same rights as other members of Scheduled Castes. As the law currently stands, a Dalit Christian is no longer technically considered a member of a Scheduled Caste and is no longer entitled to benefits, even though in practice, he or she is not freed from the social restrictions of the caste system.

Church leaders who met recently with Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi referred to the 1996 draft, saying, "We pray that your government will now re-introduce this legislation and get it approved as a constitutional amendment."

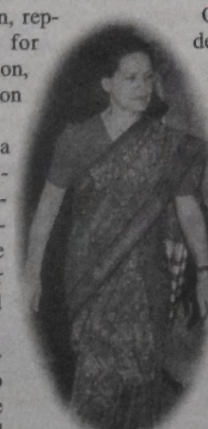
India's National Minorities Commission also acknowledged this dilemma in a 1997-98 report. "The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order of 1950 should be amended to omit altogether the proviso that a person belonging to a particular religion cannot be regarded as a member of a Scheduled Caste," the report stated.

Christian groups in India have long campaigned for the extension of basic reservation rights to Dalit and Tribal Christians. In the past, several memorandums have been given to prime ministers and many rallies have been held throughout the country.

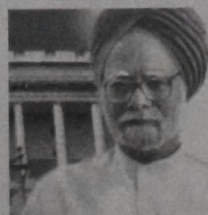
Campaigners now await the response of the federal government.



Dalit mother and daughter



Sonia Gandhi



Manmohan Singh

Sixty more evangelical Christians jailed in Eritrea

LOS ANGELES (Compass) — Sixty members of the Rema Charismatic Church in the Eritrean capital of Asmara have been arrested and jailed for holding a New Year's Eve celebration in the home of one of their church leaders.

On the night of December 31, police officials took into custody the hosts of the gathering, Habteab Oqbamichel and his wife Letensae, along with another 23 men and 35 women. According to eyewitnesses of the arrests, at least five of the young men detained were minors.

When police arrived on New Year's eve, they halted the celebration, taking everyone present to Asmara's Police Station. The following day, January 1, the women were all transferred to Mai-Serwa, a military camp just north of Asmara, where they were put into solitary confinement.

Although the men were first thought to have been taken to a separate, unknown location, sources confirmed that the men are currently incarcerated at Mai-Serwa, as well. A few days later one of the 60 prisoners was set free.

Well-known Christian singer Helen Berhane has been jailed alone in a metal shipping container at this same military center since last May for refusing to deny her evangelical faith or sign a promise to stop participating in local Protestant activities.

Prisoners held in these containers at Mai-Serwa "where conditions are harsh and infectious diseases such as diarrhea are common" are never charged with any crime or brought to trial, according to an Amnesty International report.

This was Habteab Oqbamichel's third arrest over what the Eritrean government calls "illegal religious activities." Last March, the Oqbamichel couple were arrested at their home and sent to prison along with their five children. Police told Habteab Oqbamichel that Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki had ordered them to arrest anyone not belonging to the four "official" religions recognized by the government: Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran and Muslim.

Accused with trying to "start a new religion," Oqbamichel and his family were later released. He had previously been arrested and beaten with several dozen other Rema Church members caught holding prayer meetings in their homes in May 2003.

Evangelical Christians incarcerated for their faith have suffered severe physical abuse during repeated arrests and harassments since May 2002, when the government closed all their church premises and outlawed worship even in their homes. The banned groups include Pentecostal and charismatic congregations, as well as Adventist, Presbyterian, Assemblies of God and Methodist-linked churches.

Upwards of 400 evangelicals are believed to be currently under arrest for their faith, including three prominent pastors jailed since last May. There are also scores of young soldiers doing compulsory military service who have been jailed for praying, reading the Bible or worshipping in groups.

Eritrean laws prohibit the detention of any citizen without charges for more than 30 days.

According to BBC correspondent Jonah Fisher, expelled in September after 18 months as an international reporter in Asmara, the Eritrean government seems to be "afraid that people who consider their highest allegiance to be [to] God, at some point may not be patriotic and follow the state's instructions."

President Isaias and his government's leaders were Marxist-oriented freedom fighters who led Eritrea's 31-year war for independence, finally won in 1993. But over the past three years, the regime has jailed thousands of political dissidents, including prominent members of parliament and journalists as well as minority religious congregations.

The Faith Church in Massawa has been closed.



Church

Sudanese churches say huge resources needed to resettle refugees

Fredrick Nzwilli

Nairobi (ENI)—Sudanese church leaders say they are ready to receive millions of refugees returning home following the signing of an agreement to end Sudan's civil war but caution that huge resources will be needed to resettle the returnees.

"They don't have homes. They don't have food. Our challenge is how we can resettle them," Archbishop Joseph Marona of the Episcopal Church of Sudan told Ecumenical News International in Nairobi. "These are great challenges. We will need huge resources."

Retired Roman Catholic Bishop Paride Taban of Torit diocese said refugees had already started returning home before the signing on Sunday of the agreement. It aims



Refugee Joseph Makir Kurjok "It's been our desire ever since to have peace, home is a better place than any other place and we are happy that we shall soon be going back. But we need the international community to support us because we are starting from zero, we do not even have chickens, goats, cows or even seeds to plant, this should be considered very seriously."

to end a more than 21 year-long war between the mainly Christian and animist South and the Muslim North, that has displaced up to five million people.

"We find the roads full of refugees returning without being told to go home," said Taban.

The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) which has been fighting for autonomy in the south of Sudan said

it would require 1 billion US dollars every year for six years to return, resettle, rehabilitate and re-integrate the refugees and internally displaced persons.

The European Union has pledged 400 million euros (US\$526 million) while the United States has promised to increase its aid to Sudan to 200 million dollars.

Britain on January 10 pledged 50 million pounds sterling (US\$94 million) towards the rebuilding of Sudan, to be channeled through the United Nations. "The UN has led international humanitarian action in Darfur as well as responded to the needs of Sudanese people," Britain's development minister, Hilary Benn, told news agencies.

Bright Mawudor, an official of the All Africa Conference of Churches, said the church grouping had put aside \$50,000 in its 2005-6 budget to support Sudanese civil society.

"The AACC is committed to ensure the civil society is educated to give a practical interpretation of the peace signed," said Mawudor, who is the African church body's finance and administration director. He said the Geneva-based World Council of Churches had also committed \$100,000 to support similar activities.

Sudan church leaders elated at peace accord, but hard work starts

Fredrick Nzwilli

Nairobi (ENI)—Sudanese church leaders have expressed happiness at the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Nairobi on Sunday, but warn the actual work for holding in check a decades-long racial, religious and economic conflict has just begun.

"Many people in southern Sudan are joyful about this signing of peace," Archbishop Joseph Marona of the Episcopal Church of Sudan told Ecumenical News International. "The peace means a lot to them because southern Sudan has suffered for many years."

Marona, however, challenged churches to take a lead in reconciling a traumatized community, and he noted the real work for peace was just starting. "People have killed

their relatives," said the bishop. "This is very painful. We have to teach them not to pay wrong for wrong. They also have to forgive themselves."

After two years of negotiations in Kenya, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army leader, John Garang, and Sudan's vice-president Ali Osman Taha signed the accord to the sounds of jubilation from Sudanese people present at a ceremony also attended by African heads of state and other world leaders.

The signing officially ended more than 21 years of war that has left at least two million people dead, mainly from famine and disease. The conflict between the largely black, Christian and animist South against the Muslim North has displaced up to five million people.

"We applaud the South and North for signing the peace agreement," Kenyan Anglican Archbishop Benjamin Nzimbi said in Nairobi. "It is our prayer that Sudan will now be peaceful and the people will work together to build their country. We hope the reli-

gious groups will also tolerate each other."

The accord has eight protocols detailing power and wealth sharing, security and a permanent ceasefire. It also directs how the comprehensive agreement will be implemented.

"We are very satisfied because it meets the expectation of peace in Southern Sudan," said the Rev. Paul Yugusuk of the Episcopal Church of Sudan. He added that the agreement would deliver peace based on the Christian ideas of love, forgiveness, reconciliation and unity.

With the agreement in place, the parliament in Khartoum and the rebel's Liberation Council will separately adopt it, after which Garang will be made Sudan's first vice-president as well as the president of the government of Southern Sudan. Within six months the Sudanese constitution has to be amended to enable the formation of a government of national unity with the rebels.

Representing the World Council of Churches and the All Africa Conference of Churches at the signing, Bright Mawudor, the AACC director of Finance and Administration, said the two ecumenical bodies would support civil society in implementing the accord.

The treaties do not deal with the unrelated strife in western Sudan's Darfur region, where tens of thousands of people have died of malnutrition and disease in the past year and hundreds of thousands made homeless.

Pictures taken from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

Top 10 news stories of the persecuted church in 2004 as selected by Compass Direct

10. **TURKEY:** Authorities finally 'legalize' new Protestant church in Diyarbakir, making it the first new Protestant church opened in southeastern Turkey since the founding of the Turkish republic.

9. **SRI LANKA:** Debate continues on anti-conversion law: the campaign to win support for a proposed anti-conversion bill in Sri Lanka launched by Buddhist monks seems to have succeeded.

8. **PAKISTAN:** Christian minority weathers another year of murders, kidnappings and false blasphemy charges. Despite government assurances that Pakistan's minority Christians enjoy full protection and religious freedom, 2004 was marked by repeated outbreaks of violence against Christian clergy and laymen, with virtual impunity for the aggressors.

7. **INDONESIA:** Death toll rises in Sulawesi, as Indonesian Christians continued to be targets of violent attacks by extremists.

6. **VIETNAM:** The People's Court of Ho Chi Minh City handed out harsh sentences to six Vietnamese "Mennonite six" church workers for practicing their faith.

5. **NIGERIA:** fresh violence erupted in Plateau state: the bloodiest Muslim-Christian clash in recent months resulted in the deaths of at least 350 people; some press reports put the death toll as high as 630.

4. **INDIA:** Hindu 'defense army' fights christian conversions: India's extremist organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), continued its self-declared "war" against Christianity despite the defeat of Hindu nationalist parties in parliamentary elections.

3. **ERITREA:** incommunicado imprisonment of evangelical pastors continues: Eritrean authorities arrested and jailed three prominent Protestant pastors in late May, escalating a two-year government crackdown against the country's evangelical Christians.

2. **IRAN:** year-long ripple of arrests across Iran leaves one pastor still jailed. Arrested with 85 other church leaders on September 9 by the Iranian security police, Hamid Pourmand, a lay pastor, was not released with the others but was transferred to a military prison. A former Muslim, Pourmand converted to Christianity nearly 25 years ago. A Muslim convicted of apostasy faces the death penalty under Iran's Islamic courts.

1. **CHINA:** arrest of house church leaders confirms repressive trend. Chinese police arrested 100 house church leaders on June 11 as they gathered for a retreat in the central city of Wuhan. They were released from police custody, but told to go to their home towns and villages where they are required to stay. Since many of them are evangelists who travel widely throughout China, the order was interpreted as an effort to control their movements.

Refugee Rebecca Alwel Mayor, teacher "Women suffered a lot during the war, they ran into forests carrying babies on their backs without food to eat and they stayed in the wilderness for long days bearing the pain of their children suffering, some were raped and beaten by the militia. Now it's time for them to maybe start life afresh. The peace deal is a very important thing for women."



Theological Reflection

God & the tsunami

By R. Albert Mohler Jr

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)—The scale of suffering and the magnitude of the disaster in Southeast Asia defy the imagination. Sitting comfortably in our own homes and offices, we can look at the images, video segments and computer simulations, knowing all the while that, in the nations that encircle the Indian Ocean, the death toll continues to mount.

This much is clear—the direct death toll from this disaster is likely to reach 250,000, and subsequent deaths related to the disaster may drive the total number of deaths to well over half a million. Those numbers are hard to take, but the video images are even harder to see. Satellite pictures taken before and after the massive tsunamis struck unprotected coastlines tell the story. Before the tsunami, a thriving region is clearly visible. In the aftermath, entire towns, villages, and cities have been wiped off the map. A wall of water traveling several hundred miles an hour and reaching the height of a multi-story building slammed into Thailand, India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka with devastating force. At least nine nations were affected, with some of the waves bringing destruction as far away as Somalia on Africa's eastern coast.

The magnitude of this disaster is multiplied when we realize that these very areas most devastated by the tsunamis are among the most impoverished and helpless regions of the earth. On Dec. 26, families were washed away, children were ripped from their parents' arms and suffering beyond description settled upon the earth. Why?

That question comes immediately to the mind of any sensitive person and any individual whose mind is allowed to rest for even a moment upon the magnitude of this disaster. At the first level, the scientific explanation seems clear. A massive earthquake, registering over 9.0 on the Richter scale, occurred more than six miles beneath the surface of the Pacific, just off the Indonesian island of Sumatra. In an instant, one of the most beautiful parts of the world became one of the most deadly, as successive mountains of water radiated from the epicenter of the quake and headed for some of the earth's most densely populated coastal areas. The sliding of tectonic plates



Nine days after the tsunami swept across Banda Aceh, Indonesia, a woman who has found her mother's lifeless body wedged in debris begs passersby to help recover the corpse.

beneath the surface of the ocean led to massive devastation and a tidal wave of grief and questions.

How do Christians explain this kind of suffering? What do we have to say about the meaning of an event like this? In short order, questions like these found their way to the front pages of newspapers and the front lines of our cultural conversation. All too soon, confusion was evident, as various religious leaders offered advice and counsel.

Writing in *The Guardian*, reporter Martin Kettle put the problem in clear form: "Earthquakes and the belief in the judgment of God are, indeed, very hard to reconcile. However, no religion that offers an explanation of the world can avoid making some kind of an attempt to fit the two together." As Kettle asserted, "As with previous earthquakes, any explanation of this latest one poses us a sharp intellectual choice. Either there is an entirely natural explanation for it, or there is some other kind. Even the natural one is by no means easy to imagine, but it is at least wholly coherent."

For the atheist or agnostic, the natural explanation will suffice. Those who hold to a naturalistic and materialistic worldview will simply see this disaster as one more meaningless event taking place in a meaningless universe. As British philosopher Bryan Appleyard concluded, "The simple truth

is what it has always been: nature, uncontrolled, unbidden, unpredictable, can still humble our pride and wreck our schemes in an instant. We are a thin film of thought confined to a narrow band around an undistinguished planet orbiting a pretty average star." In other words, this is just one more accident taking place in an accidental world, observed by accidental human creatures.

The challenge to the Christian faith is clear, even as it is often crudely put forth by secular critics. If God is both omnipotent and benevolent, how can disasters like this happen? This question was stated concisely by playwright Archibald MacLeish in his Pulitzer-prize winning play, "J.B." Through his character Nickles, MacLeish poses the theological challenge: "If God is God, He is not good; if God is good, He is not God."

An example of how not to give a Christian answer was provided by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. Writing in *The Sunday Telegraph*, Williams said this: "Every single random, accidental death is something that should upset a faith bound up with comfort and ready answers. Faced with the paralyzing magnitude of a disaster like this, we naturally feel more deeply outraged—and also more deeply helpless. We can't see how this is going to be dealt with, we can't see how to make it better. We know, with a rather sick feeling, that we shall

have to go on facing it and we can't make it go away or make ourselves feel good." The newspaper headlined the archbishop's column, "Of Course This Makes Us Doubt God's Existence." After the article was published, the archbishop protested the headline, and his spokesman claimed that the paper's characterization of the archbishop's article was "a misrepresentation of the archbishop's views."

In response, the paper acknowledged that while it may have misrepresented the archbishop's argument, nevertheless, "he himself must accept much of the blame." Surely speaking for the paper's readers as well as its editors, the paper observed, "His prose is so obscure, his thought processes so hard to follow, that his message is often unclear." In exasperation, the paper simply concluded, "If Dr. Williams hopes to teach and inspire his flock, he really must learn to express himself more clearly. Otherwise he will be forever doomed to be the victim of his own erudition."

In Australia, much closer to the tragedy, the Anglican dean of Sydney, Phillip Jensen, explained that natural disasters are a part of God's warning that judgment is coming. Jensen was right of course, as Jesus himself pointed to natural disasters as a warning to human beings of our own mortality and of the coming judgment

of God. Nevertheless, this was too much for more liberal churchmen in Australia. Neil Brown, dean of Saint Mary's Cathedral (Catholic), described Jensen's comments as "a rather horrible belief when you begin to think about it."

Well, that's orthodox Christian theology, when you think about it. Jesus clearly warned his disciples that famines and earthquakes, along with wars and other ominous phenomena, would be the "birth pangs" of coming tribulation and judgment (Matthew 24:7-8).

This is no time for theological hand-wringing and evasion. A great tragedy like this often is the catalyst for bad theology offered as soothing counsel from religious professionals.

A faithful Christian response will affirm the true character and power of God—his omnipotence and his benevolence. God is in control of the entire universe, and there is not even a single atom outside his sovereignty. And God's goodness and love are beyond question. The Bible leaves no room for equivocation on either truth.

We must speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Scripture is silent. Christians must avoid offering explanations when God has not revealed an explanation. Finally, Christians must respond to a crisis like this by weeping with those who weep, by praying with fervent faithfulness, by offering concrete assistance in Christ's name and, most importantly, by bearing bold witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the only way to bring life out of death.

The tragedy unfolding in the Indian Ocean demands the world's attention—and calls for a clear Christian response. In the aftermath of the disaster, some religious leaders suggested that God was simply unable to prevent the tsunamis that destroyed so many lives. Some secularists jumped on the opportunity to argue that the tragedy is further proof that God does not exist. Others simply blamed the earthquake and tidal waves on fate or claimed that God had sent the destruction as punishment for the victims' sins.

How are we to deal with this? What approach will affirm the full measure of Christian truth while taking the disaster into honest account?

Reflection

Hymn: *Give us strength to make a new tomorrow*

*In times like these, we strain to sing a hymn of exaltation.
Our voices fill with bitter tears, our souls, with lamentation.
The seas have swelled, we wonder where you were midst nature's violence
We long to sing with joy and praise, but shudder at your absence.*

*Creating God, you spoke your Word and guided this world's making.
Where was your voice to turn the tide, to calm the deep earth's quaking?
We have no words to understand the scope of human sorrow.
So speak through us and give us strength to make a new tomorrow.*

*Redeeming Christ, you raised your hand, and winds and waves were quiet.
But now we see no miracle when oceans go aright.
The roaring wave rekindles fears, reminds us of our weakness.
Awake, O Lord, and calm our souls! Cast out despair and bleakness!*

*O Spirit, once you brooded o'er the face of formless waters
So comfort those whose lives are rent, who've lost their sons and daughters.
And stir our hearts, though numbed by pain, to newfound depth of feeling
And make us agents of your love, your grace, your hope, your healing.*

Written by the Rev. Paul Janssen. It can be sung to the tune "Was Mein Gott Will" (153 in Rejoice in the Lord) or to St. Columba, but that will make it eight verses long. Permission is granted to use this hymn in your congregation; simply inform Paul that you've used

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First, a faithful Christian response must affirm the true character and power of God. The Bible leaves no room for doubting either the omnipotence or the benevolence of God. The God of the Bible is not a passive bystander, nor a deistic Creator who has withdrawn from his creation and is simply watching it unfold. Just as creation itself was a trinitarian event, so also the triune God reigns over his creation. There is not one atom or molecule in the entire cosmos that is not under the sovereign rule of God. As the Christian tradition has always affirmed, God's active lordship over the universe is the sole explanation for why the cosmos even holds together.

At the center of this universe is the fundamental fact of the supremacy of Jesus Christ. As the Apostle Paul noted in Colossians 1:15-17, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Jesus Christ is the explanatory principle of the universe, and any effort to understand the creation apart from its Creator can lead only to confusion.

Liberal theology attempts to

solve this problem by cutting God down to size and removing him from the equation. Having established a truce with the naturalistic worldview, liberal theology simply accommodates itself to the secular temptation by denying God's active and sovereign rule. In other words, God's goodness is affirmed while his greatness is denied. Process theology does this by putting God within the created order, struggling along with his creation toward maturity. At the popular level, this theological approach was turned into a bestseller several years ago by Rabbi Harold Kushner in his book, *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*. The rabbi simply asserted that God is doing the best he can under the circumstances. He would like to prevent tragedies like cancer, hurricanes and earthquakes from happening — he is simply unable to do so.

This is not the God who revealed himself in the Bible. God's omnipotence is clearly revealed and unconditionally asserted. At the same time, God's goodness is equally affirmed. Christians must point to these conjoined truths as the very basis for our confidence that life is worth living and that God is ultimately in control of the universe.

Second, in affirming the full measure of Christian truth in light of the tsunamis, we must avoid attempting to explain what God has

Of mountains and molehills

A few weeks into January and I'm already lamenting some of those New Year's resolutions I haven't managed to lived up to. I haven't decided yet whether to shake them off completely, or to make one last ditch effort to see them through. Statistics speak against the likelihood of success. They also remind me I'm not alone in my struggles.

These wintry evenings have provided an opportunity for me to look back through some old journals at New Year's reflections of the past. I've learned some interesting things about myself.

At first glance it may appear that I'm coping with different issues now than in times gone by. To some extent that's true, since my family situation is changing. My children no longer live at home full-time. One has a job, the other is in college; the other is working part-time and studying full-time. I no longer have to make an appointment to use my own car. I'm not called on to help with daily homework assignments. But I do edit term papers free of charge. There is less laundry, except on Saturdays. I'm glad my kids usually come home on weekends, and call frequently during the week. They still trust me for heart-to-heart talks and occasionally even ask my advice.

Family meals, once a daily event, are now a rare treat. However, Jack and I still like to eat, and since he still can't cook, (not anything you'd want to put in your mouth, anyway) groceries, meal preparation and clean-up remain on my agenda, just on a smaller scale. Basically the work I do in the home and for the farm hasn't diminished. But I'm rediscovering the pleasure of being half of a couple with Jack, and even finding little snippets of time here and there to pursue my own interests without guilt. In some ways life is changing, but at heart, I see patterns that persist through the years.

For starters, I set impossibly high standards for myself. Then I either beat myself up for not meeting them, or for being dumb enough to aim that high in the first place. Either way, by distracting myself with lofty aspirations I can successfully avoid any realistic progress I might make on smaller matters.

For example, one of my favorite personal issues is time management. I'm convinced that by rising earlier, working harder and being better organized I could become a happier, more fulfilled individual. I've read reams of information on the subject. I wrote a couple of articles on it. I even produced an entire workshop for a professional speaker to present to business people. Oh, I know how it's done. I may actually even carry it off for a day or two at a time. But when it comes right down to it — there's a huge gap between theory and practice.

not explained. In the end, the Christian knows that all suffering — indeed every experience of life — is meaningful. We understand that God is revealing himself in every moment of our existence. We also know that all suffering is ultimately caused by sin. That's about as politically incorrect an assertion as we can now imagine — but it is profoundly true.

Even so, we must be very care-

ful in how we present this truth. In the Gospel of John (John 9:1-7), Jesus and his disciples were confronted with a man blind from birth. His disciples, posing the conventional question of their day, asked Jesus: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?" Jesus responded that it was neither the sin of this man nor the sin of his parents that explained his blindness;

Intangible Things

Heidi VanDerSlikke

Little tricks to more efficiently use the 24 hours I'm given each day only make minor differences in the big picture. The best "time management technique" I can master is to learn that time manages me, not the other way around.

In addition to thinking that I should be doing everything perfectly and efficiently, I have this idea that I should be accomplishing great things. For God, of course. In the hopes of being inspired in that direction, I picked up a book by John Ortberg entitled, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat*. Not exactly a theological heavyweight, Ortberg does write with humor and insight that I can appreciate. Among other things, he suggests that there comes a point, when you're sure the call to get out of the boat has come from God, that you have to "get your feet wet" and take a leap of faith, or at least a tiny step.

Reflecting on that concept I had to admit my own shortcoming. I may look to God for his guidance and approval, but then I rally my own resources and wit to see the job through. Too often my leap of faith is based on faith in myself. I don't have to tell you what happens after that, do I?

Ortberg says we should ask ourselves an intriguing question: What am I doing that I could not do apart from the power of God? The implication here is that we're all gifted for the honor and glory of God, and therefore we should all be doing great things. Here I am, well into my forties and I have to say my list of "great accomplishments" is pretty short. Frankly, when I make plans to move mountains, I mostly trip over molehills. On the other hand, if I ask the question "What am I doing that I could not do apart from the power of God?" I could honestly answer, "Breathing." Seems pretty important to me.

My point is not that we should become complacent and willing to loaf along through life with as little effort as possible. But God's children have to learn to really trust him with their lives. That means no matter what happens in a day — glorious or mundane, victorious or tragic — we need to accept that day as a good and perfect gift from his hand. It requires a paradigm shift. Maybe I'll make that my New Year's resolution. Here's to 2005 — may it be a year of great things in your life.

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rather, "It was so that the works of God might be displayed in him." In other words, Jesus boldly explained that this man was born blind so that in the miracle Jesus was about to perform, his restored sight would be evidence of the dawning of the Kingdom and of the glory of God.

Armed with this knowledge, we must be very circumspect in as-

See *Tsunami* page 12...

Reflection

Reading Waves

You may welcome a quick death when you do not read waves.

My wife Joy and I were in Brazil last summer. We had a day to be at the beach, and although it was windy, it was warm enough to swim. Rio de Janeiro is known for a number of things, including large surfer waves and beach theft. So I guarded our belongings while Joy jumped into the seven foot waves. We had planted our towels under a small red Portuguese sign. In no time Joy came back panting, commenting on the strength of the waves. I smiled. I had more experience with wave diving, and looked forward to wrestling through the crashing foam. We exchanged the guard post by the towels. Over the last two weeks I had learned to float high with the waves when they were still rolling, but to dive into them when they were breaking. I did this for about half an hour, successfully keeping myself from being trounced by a wave and nauseated with salt water. Tired, I decided it was time to crawl out of the push and pull of water.

Lost at sea

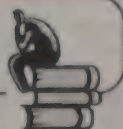
It was then that I noticed I could no longer touch the sand beneath my feet, and my wife appeared as a small figurine on the shore. I was surprised, and began to swim back. I did the front crawl, then the side-stroke and then a back crawl, and my wife only shrunk in view. Now a little concerned, I rose up in the water and waved frantically at Joy. She saw me, stood up, and with a big smile waved back. Eventually I realized I wasn't going to make it to shore, and I was simply exhausting myself. I floated up and down on the waves, reminding myself how panicking only makes things worse. By the grace of God a surfer came by and told me to grab on to his board. "Didn't you see the red sign on the shore?" He asked me in English. "It says 'dangerous currents: no swimming.'" As we angled our way back to safety, he explained how waves hit the shore in a circular motion. They come in on an angle and circle back. I happened to be swimming where they circled back. A direct path to shore was impossible.

Waterworld culture

There are a number of unwary tourists who can't tell this story. It stands as a reminder to those who may swim in unfamiliar waters. But the story can also function as a metaphor for Christian participation in broader culture. There have been a number of books comparing contemporary society to wild and uncharted water, and I will briefly

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman



mention two of them. Leonard Sweet in his book *Soul Tsunami: Sink or Swim in the New Millennium Culture* (Zondervan, 1999) exclaims that "a sea change of transitions and transformations is birthing a whole new world ... we have moved from the solid ground of terra firma to the tossing seas of terra aqua." Its time, he declares, for a "Postmodern Reformation" and the "Noah's Dove Churches"—scouting out the new world—are leading the way forward. Similarly, Liquid Church (Hendrikson, 2002) by Peter Ward calls us to a liquid Reformation, a shift from the tired attendance-focused refuge of "solid church" to a new kind of church that is a "more fluid or networked kind of community based on small groups." Ward's ekklesia is a flexible, informal mission-focused fellowship in the midst of a world in a constant state of flux.

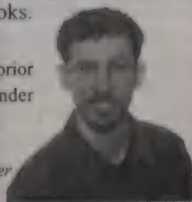
Stuck in the shallows

The problem with fluid culture is that if you don't know how to read its waves, you may drift out to sea. Reggie McNeal in his book *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (Jossey-Bass, 2003) warns that "we have a church in North America that is more secular than the culture. Just when the church adopted a business model, the culture went looking for God. Just when the church embraced strategic planning (linear and Newtonian), the universe shifted to preparedness (loopy and quantum). Just when the church began building recreation centres, the culture began a search for sacred space." In effect, "going with the flow" can land you in pretty shallow eddies. Think about it in terms of my beach. Biblical books are the signs that tell the story of our place. Our tradition is the people on shore who share past experiences and give us a sense of perspective. As a fellowship, we need to learn which waves to ride together, which to dive through, and together discern when we're drifting too far from shore. Waves and currents are ignored to our own detriment. We are therefore called to be perpetual students of the waves, studying their movements and navigating with the wind of the Spirit. Because students do not only read books.

They read the world.

Note: This column was written prior to the tsunami, which may engender quite different thoughts on waves.

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be thwarted. "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know.... I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes." Job's humility should serve as a model for our own.

As Paul reminds us, the judgments of God are unsearchable and unfathomable (Romans 11:33). Unless God reveals the purpose of his acts and the working of his will among us, we would do well to affirm his sovereignty and goodness, while holding back from placing blame on human agents for disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes.

At the same time, the Bible is clear that sin is the fundamental explanation for these awful disasters. Not sin that is immediately traceable to one individual or another, or even to a specific culture, but the sin that is so clearly indicted in the biblical account of the fall of man. According to Genesis chapter 3, Adam's sin had cosmic implications and effects. The effects of sin are evident all around us, most clearly in the undeniable fact of death. This is why the redemptive work of God in Christ points to a new heaven and a new earth as coming realities. As Paul explains, "We know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." In Revelation 21, we are told of a new heaven and a new earth and of a day when God will wipe away every tear from the eyes of the redeemed, "and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

Third, Christians must respond with the love of Christ and the power of the Gospel. Jesus is our great example in responding to such crises. When confronted with the man born blind, Jesus healed the man and showed the glory of God. In response to the death of Lazarus, Jesus brought life out of death, even as he had mourned with Lazarus' sisters.

While Christians are not empowered to perform similar miracles, we are called to be agents of Christ's love and mercy. Following our Lord's example, we must first mourn with those who

mourn. The unspeakable grief and incalculable suffering experienced by literally millions of persons in southern Asia should prompt every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ to fervent prayer, concern, generosity and sympathy.

Relief efforts are now under way, and Christians should be at the forefront of this response. Churches, denominations and Christian agencies are sending support in the form of food, medical care, reconstruction programs and other forms of humanitarian assistance. In offering concrete help and assistance, Christians are doing nothing less than following the express command and example of Jesus Christ.

Beyond this, Christians must seize this opportunity to confront this awful disaster with the life-changing power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Christians are to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty and assistance, Christians are doing nothing less than following the express command and example of Jesus Christ. This is a powerful testimony, but acts of compassion must be accompanied by words of conviction. Our answer to this reality of unspeakable tragedy must be witness to the Gospel of unfathomable power—the power to bring life out of death.

Furthermore, we must indeed point to this disaster as only a hint of the cataclysm that is yet to come—the holy judgment of God. On that day, the tidal waves of Dec 26, 2004, will be understood to have been one of the warnings all humanity should have heeded.

This is no time for Christian equivocation or cowardice. In the face of tragedy and suffering on this scale, we must answer with the full measure of Christian conviction and the undiluted truth of Christianity. In this life, we are not given all the answers to the questions we might pose, but God has given us all that we need to know in order to understand our peril and his provision for us in Christ.

So, let us weep with those who weep, pray for those who suffer, give and go in missions of mercy, and bear bold witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not only in southern Asia, but right here at home.

R. Albert Mohler Jr. is president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky. For more articles and resources by Dr. Mohler, and for information on The Albert Mohler Program, a daily national radio program broadcast on the Salem Radio Network, go to www.albertmohler.com.

Tsunami ... cont. from p.11

signing blame for natural evil. Were the people of Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India more sinful than all others? Did God send this tsunami because of the paganisms so prevalent in southern Asia? English newspaper columnist Martin Kettle posed an interesting observation: "Certainly the giant waves generated by the quake made no attempt to differentiate between the religions of those whom it made its victims. Hindus were swept away

in India, Muslims were carried off in Indonesia, Buddhists in Thailand. Visiting Christians and Jews received no special treatment either."

We are in absolutely no position to argue that there is no link between human sin and this awful tragedy. The Bible makes clear that God sometimes does respond to specific sin with cataclysmic natural disaster. Just ask the towns of Sodom and Gomorrah. Neverthe-

less, in the Bible's book most centrally concerned with the issue of suffering, it is Job's friends, who tried to offer detailed theological explanations, who end up looking foolish—and worse. Job himself was censured by God for "darkened counsel by words without knowledge." In the end, Job is vindicated by God's grace and mercy, and Job can only respond, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can

Farm / Relationships

Teeth forced to tell the story



These cows got mad when asked to show their teeth, so we gave up.

Maynard van der Galien

Farmers sending beef to an abattoir have found out that the rules at the slaughterhouse have changed after Canada had one cow with BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy), commonly referred to as mad-cow.

Since July of last year (2003), the operator at the abattoir and an inspector with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) have to examine the incisor teeth of each carcass post-mortem at or before the head inspection station. Abattoir plant personnel examining teeth must be able to recognize permanent incisor teeth and be knowledgeable of the new policy.

Cattle are considered to be aged 30 months or older when they have more than two permanent incisor teeth erupted (i.e. the first pair of permanent incisor and at least one tooth from the second pair of permanent incisors).

That's how they tell the age of the Canadian beef that goes to the grocery store/butcher shop you shop in, and the boxed boneless beef that goes for export. It's also how they tell the age of the beef that farmers have fattened up for their freezers.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency says checking the number of permanent teeth is the most effective method for now. Farmers can attest to the fact that it doesn't tell the true age of the animal.

When a carcass has been identified as being derived from an animal aged 30 months or older, it must be marked in a way that will permit easy identification of the head and the carcass sides (and quarters as needed) up to the point where all specified risk materials

(SRM) are removed.

Specified Risk Materials are defined as the skull, brain, trigeminal ganglia, eyes, tonsils, spinal cord and dorsal root ganglia.

Abattoir plant personnel tell me inspectors spray the backbone with bright colored paint so that it has to be cut out and thrown away.

In the Meat Hygiene Manual of Procedures, CFIA says "operators may be able to reduce or eliminate the need for certain requirements under this part if this does not affect the outcome of the policy. For example, an operator may decide to treat all slaughter cattle as being derived from animals aged 30 months or older. In such a case, specified risk material would be removed from all carcasses regardless of their age. There would therefore be no need to mark the head and the carcass sides (unless the removal of the vertebral column is performed in another establishment)."

"A CFIA inspector will monitor the accuracy of the operator's examination of incisor teeth, aging and carcass identification during the inspection of the head. Their focus with respect to the age determination will be on carcasses that are judged by the operator to be under 30 months of age."

An abattoir owner told me the technique is controversial because the eruption of permanent incisor teeth is known to vary according to the animal's sex, breed and diet. Some breeds get their permanent teeth as young as 24 months.

There's nothing we can do, said the abattoir owner. We have to go by the teeth. And then we have to call the farmer and tell them that the backbone has to be cut out. It makes a lot more work for us and

Get a grip – TODAY!

I have been musing about Japan's crown princess Masako. She disappears from the public eye every once in a while. Last summer she was diagnosed with an "adjustment disorder." Newspapers reported her symptoms included sleeplessness and anxiety resulting from stress. The main cause of her stress seems to be from her special status as crown princess, problems related to her pregnancy and miscarriage, and the difficulty she has in drawing a line between her public and private life. Princess Masako is Harvard educated and a former diplomat. She was a trade specialist at the Foreign Ministry before her marriage. Now, she mostly appears in public for ceremonial occasions and does not speak out on many subjects.

Who has the adjustment disorder? I wonder about the label "adjustment disorder." What is she suppose to be adjusting to that might be causing her distress? The current empress Michiko also suffered a lot during her early years as crown princess in the 1960s. Could there be a connection here? At a news conference some time ago princess Masako said, "At times, I experience hardship in trying to find the proper point of balance between traditional things and my own personality." She also said, "While placing importance on old things are good, is it not also important to take into account the demands of a new age?"

I don't think her spouse or parents-in-law are the problem. They seem to be decent human beings and are probably encouraging the princess to be straightforward about herself. But I wonder about the old traditional palace guard that continues to have ongoing influence in the imperial family. What expectations do these elderly gentlemen have of the smart and astute princess? Could it be they may be having a tough time squeezing princess Masako into the round peg of their own making? If this is so, who could have the adjustment disorder?

Of witches and weak women

All this musing brings me to the January issue of the "Today" devotional published by the Back to God Hour. Check out the commentary on the 20th entitled "The Witch Queen." The author uses the witch queen, Artemis and her Amazon henchwomen, as metaphors for contemporary female influences who encourage women to either cloyingly cling to or cruelly crush the male gender. To overcome this kind of behavior he reminds women they are liberated and encourages them to be mindful of 1 Timothy 2:11, which urges them to learn in quietness and full submission. What rubbish is all of this?

Still, I agree with him when he writes he is "wishing more and more that women didn't need men so badly – and that men would stop behaving

our customer gets some cuts of meat minus the bone. The farmer is very upset because he knows the animal is only two years old. But the teeth show it's older, and that's what we have to go by. The inspector sprays it with orange paint and we have to remove it, he said.

"I hate having to call dairy farmers that the young beef they

fatten up, the teeth showed it was 30 months old. You know yourself dairy farmers keep good records when their cows calve. They tell you profoundly that the heifer you just slaughtered is just so many months old," he said.

I had a similar experience this spring when I sent four young beef to an abattoir. Two animals were

so badly." At the same time, the church needs to take responsibility for having socialized and theologized the role of women as mere appendages to men since the beginning of Christendom. The disturbing behavior of men and women is a consequence of the skewed message they have been taught. We reap what we sow. Of course, many women fought against this view of themselves but how does one deal with misbehaving men while fighting for equality especially in the context of "silence and full submission?" We only have to view the recent HBO film "Iron Jawed Angels" to get a reality check of the courage women needed to persevere in the struggle for freedom to vote in the United States!

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

From dependence to interdependence

How then do women and men change their behavior? I will leave the issue of men's behavior up to male commentators. As for the women, the first reality is there is no easy answer to becoming free to be yourself as God intends you to be. Still, women need to understand the difference between dependency, co-dependency and interdependence. No one is an island and to be connected in a healthy way to others can make a huge difference in a woman's life.

The second reality is the external environment in some fashion will usually try to meld you into the round peg of their own making to satisfy their needs. Being truly free is about being clear about yourself in regards to your own values and beliefs while being in connection with others. In other words, it is about knowing who you truly want to be in terms of yourself, your community and your God.

What does all of this have to do with crown princess Masako? The third reality is that the external environment – in this case the traditional palace guard – who is trying to meld her into the round peg of their own making may have an adjustment disorder. Likewise, in our Christian environment there are still those who need the "security" of 1 Tim 2:11 to couch their "understanding" of women's equality.

So, women do not be fooled, but develop your own understanding of who you wish to be in relationship to God that allows you to stand strong and firm and respectful of yourself, especially in relationship to men.

Arlene Van Hove is now on sabbatical from Cascade Christian Counselling Association in Surrey, B.C.



under 24 months of age. Yet I got a call from the abattoir that the teeth showed they were 30 months of age. There's nothing we can do. We have to remove the backbone, said the operator owner.

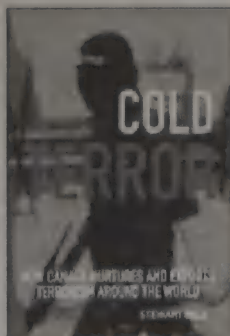
The meat was excellent. Why wouldn't it be? It was from Red Angus heifers just under two years old.

Book review

Are we in Canada enabling the work of terrorists?

Cold Terror: How Canada Nurtures and Exports Terrorism Around the World

By Stewart Bell, John Wiley & Sons Canada Ltd. 243 pp., \$36.99.



Reviewed by Harry Antonides

...[W]hen we write the history of the past 30 years of Canadian national life, it will be in substantial part a sad story of squandered opportunities and decline. It will be a story ... of the decay of civic spirit, of the full flowering of our national penchant for self-delusion, complacency and mediocrity. (Michael Bliss, National Post, November 30, 2001)

The story told here by a veteran investigative reporter is deeply disturbing. For it explores the dark corners where criminals and terrorists are thriving – assisted by their enablers who live among us.

Stewart Bell has done his homework well and is able to show how and why Canada has become a favorite hiding and support base for some very unsavoury characters and movements.

Not surprisingly, Bell has aroused the anger of those he writes about. He reports that after he wrote an article about Islamic terrorism, he received more than three thousand e-mails in one day. One left no doubt about his intentions; he wrote, "I kill you if I find you."

You may ask: How can these things be happening in this our "peaceable kingdom"? After all, are we not the envy of the world in having mastered the art of building a multicultural society where all the races and religions of the world mix in wonderful harmony and tolerance?

The land of the trusting fools?

Ironically, it is this naïve faith in the ideal of a non-existent harmony that serves as a convenient cover for those who plot their evil schemes. For it has blinded this country's political leaders to the brutal facts laid bare in this book.

What is worse, Bell reports that Canadian politicians have played up to known terrorist front organizations in order to secure the votes

in certain ethnic communities. As one Russian security official (who should be well versed in skulduggery) once told an RCMP officer that Canada is "the land of the trusting fools."

Cold Terror tackles two difficult assignments. The first is exposing those who abuse Canada's freedom and hospitality to

support terrorist organizations. The second is alerting an apathetic citizenry and its political leadership to the ugly reality.

These are the kind of tasks that would scare most people away – as in fact they have. But not Stewart Bell. Instead, he exposes in numbing detail the complicated networks of terrorism that have their tentacles right into this country.

Terrorism in Canada pre-dates Al Qaeda

Since September 11, 2001 our attention has been focused on Middle Eastern terrorism. But other terrorists and their sympathizers have used Canada as a rich source of funding and planning well before that time.

The first major international terrorist incident in Canada described in *Cold Terror* occurred on April 8, 1982 when Kani Gungor, the Turkish commercial attaché was shot while walking to his car in the parking garage of his Ottawa apartment. He survived but was left paralyzed. Three members of the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) were later arrested, found guilty and sentenced to two, eight and nine years prison terms. The youngest, Haig Gharakhanian was paroled nine months into his two-year sentence, ordered deported in 1991, but had his deportation order lifted and was allowed to remain in Canada.

Later in 1982 other Armenian terrorists killed the Turkish military attaché and a security guard at the residence of the Turkish ambassador in Ottawa.

In every case, the murderers got off with relatively light sentences. Nicoghas Moundjian, an associate of the assassins who had obtained materials for an explosive device and believed in the indiscriminate use of violence, was ordered deported. But the Canadian Civil Liberties Association intervened arguing that it was uncon-

stitutional to deport someone because he is a member of an organization. A year ago Moundjian was still in Canada.

These attacks by ASALA members in Canada were met not with resolve but with sympathy, writes Bell. He is convinced that this set the stage for the Canadian response that did not bode well for the future.

Cold Terror takes a detailed look at the murderous practices of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE – or Tamil Tigers) who are fighting a guerilla war against the Sinhalese majority government of Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon). Since the start of that war in 1983 more than 62,000 people have been killed and, according to Bell, have "left one of Britain's most promising former colonies locked in a ruinous ethnic standoff."

The Tamil Tigers have developed a sophisticated network of fundraising and propaganda in Canada by a variety of means such as "government grants, front companies, fraud of every type, migrant smuggling and drugs." One CSIS report puts the amount raised by the Tigers at one million dollars per month. A May 1999 intelligence report stated, "Canada is the LTTE's largest foreign base of operations."

Bell reports on a public "Victory Celebration" at Queen's Park in Toronto, where speakers extolled the Tamils' violent civil war in Sri Lanka purportedly to right the wrongs of a thousand years. These speeches glorified martyrdom and fomented ethnic hatred and, as Bell points out, they are a "truly shocking assault on Canadian values. That such an event could take place within Canada, openly and without consequence, seems to defy common sense." This apparently did not dawn on the Liberal M.P. of Scarborough-Agincourt who was one of the guest speakers at this hatred-nurturing event.

Air India Flight 182 destroyed

Another source of violence is festering among extremist Sikhs in British Columbia who are importing one of the bitter conflicts in India into this country. The moderate editor of the Indo-Canadian Times was murdered for his views in 1986.

But the most spectacular terrorist act traced to Canadian Sikhs

was the destruction of Air India Flight 182 on June 23, 1985. This flight originating in Vancouver with destination Delhi crashed into the sea off the coast of Ireland, killing all three hundred and thirty-one passengers and crew. It was the worst terrorist attack in modern history, a record that would stand until Al Qaeda fanatics attacked the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001.

Canadian security personnel who had been keeping a close eye on leaders of the radical Sikh organizations in British Columbia immediately knew that this was an act of terrorism. They succeeded in tracing the explosives and the timing device used in the destruction of Flight 182 to members of the Sikh community in British Columbia.

One of the main suspects, Talwinder Singh Parmar, a Sikh priest, had been under surveillance by the newly established Canadian Security Intelligence Service. But the investigative work was bungled by lack of cooperation between the RCMP and CSIS and careless handling of intercepted telephone conversations. (Parmar was killed in October 1992 in a confrontation with police in Jalandhar, Punjab.) Now nearly 20 years after this heinous deed, the British Columbia Supreme Court just concluded one of the costliest and longest (19 months) trial of two alleged bombers.

Partisans in the name of God

The most sophisticated and most dangerous terrorist organizations with connections in Canada are the ones that have sprouted in the Middle East, notably Hezbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the al Qaeda network. What distinguishes them is their single-minded Islamist zealotry. While some of them concentrate on one region, al Qaeda is aimed at a broader target, namely, the entire democratic West, especially the United States as the major homeland of the infidels, and Israel.

In the chapter "Partisans of God," which is the English translation of "Hezbollah," Bell traces a number of persons, including Canadian citizens, who serve as agents of Hezbollah in Canada. Some are sent here to serve as sleeper agents; others raise significant sums of money, buy equip-

ment needed for its fighters, and engage in smuggling cigarettes and stealing automobiles.

Fauzi Ayub, a father of three, is a known terrorist who arrived in Canada in 1988 and obtained Canadian citizenship. Prior to that he had been imprisoned in Bucharest for his involvement in an airplane hijacking attempt. Aided by his Canadian passport, he traveled widely to assist in Hezbollah recruitment and to plan attacks in various parts of the world.

Ayub received extensive training by Islamic Jihad in Beirut and was sent out, re-named Frank Bushy, with a counterfeit American passport. He was caught by the Israelis in June 2002 and imprisoned. In January 2004 Ayub was sent to Germany and with 27 others handed over to Hezbollah in exchange for the release of an Israeli businessman and the bodies of three Israeli servicemen.

Fateh Kamel, a forty-year-old Canadian with a wife and son in Montreal, arrived in Canada in 1987. He served as the leader of the Canadian cell of the Algerian extremist network, and spent time in various trouble spots where jihadists were active. In February 2001 he was accused in a Paris court room of "participating in a criminal association for the purposes of preparing acts of terrorism" and two counts of trafficking in fake passports for Islamic militants. He was convicted on all counts and sentenced to eight years in prison.

Algerian-born Ahmed Ressaym lived in Montreal and was a member of the Kamel group. He received world attention when caught with explosives in his car while crossing into the U. S. at the British Columbia-Washington border in December 1999 on his way to blow up the Los Angeles airport.

The best-known Canadian Islamist family is that of Ahmed Said Khadr, who spent much time in Pakistan, allegedly engaged in relief work. The truth is that he was closely allied with Osama bin Laden and that he and his sons were active in al-Qaeda. The patriarch died in a gunfight with Pakistani troops in October 2003. His fifteen-year old son Abdul-Karim was paralyzed from the waist down in the same fight, and is now recuperating courtesy of the Cana-

Continued on page 15...

Christian living

Life, though real, is useless

A.A. van Ruler

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; vanity of vanities, all is vanity. (NKJV)

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." (NIV) - Ecclesiastes 1:2

An expression like "vanity of vanities" is used in Hebrew to indicate the superlative. The "song of songs" is the most beautiful song, the "king of kings" the highest, the true king. So "vanity of vanities" is the height, the sum of all vanities.

The word "vanity" isn't used in the sense of proud, haughty, or conceited, but just in the sense of void, empty, without content. This emptiness could indicate that things have no substance or being, that they really do not exist. But it can also mean that they have no meaning or purpose and especially no use or result.

The book of Ecclesiastes has in mind not the first, but the second meaning. Not for a moment does it enter the author's mind that what he sees and does do not really exist, or that they are but a shadow, a semblance, or even a veil of appearance. Such ideas arose frequently in Greece and India. But in this respect the author is thoroughly Israelite in spirit; not for a moment does he question the reality of the existing world.

On the contrary, he stands in the middle of it; he is thoroughly involved in it. He is not seeking another world in order to locate true being there - whether in nothingness, or in the all, or in eternity. He knows only one world - the one that we experience every day. In no way does the vanity (or meaninglessness) of that world signify its unreality.

Cold Terror ...continued

dian health care system. His other son Omar fought with the Taliban and killed American medic Christopher Speer in July 2002. He is now held at the Guantanamo Bay prison camp. Their mother once stated that she would be proud if all her sons died as jihadist martyrs.

This is a small sample of many more listed in this book who are abusing Canada's openness to turn it into a base from which to export terror to other parts of the world. Bell is right to trace the

When the Preacher discusses the vanity of things, he means their futility and fruitlessness. Do they ever yield anything? Do we ever see any results? Again his thought brims with a stark realism. In fact, even this question about the sense and purpose of things is hardly posed. At least, this phraseology is still a little too subtle. He is much more concerned with utility and profit: What does a person gain from all the toil he performs under the sun?

This toil and labor is also something the Preacher or Teacher is involved in. He is not standing to one side looking on as a cool spectator, observing mankind ironically. Nor is he looking down on the rest of mankind as one of the enlightened who knows better than they. He is standing in the middle of life. He is searching for answers to his questions. But, like everyone else, he doesn't find them.

No matter how hard you work, put yourself out, and run yourself down, you never accomplish anything that has real and lasting value. Actually, it's all no use.

This, then, is the yardstick by which the Preacher measures things: he presupposes not only that the world really exists, but also that it should be useful to humankind. He expects something for and from the world and life. In this sense, we can say that he is a deeply believing person, in the Hebrew biblical sense of the word. This world is God's world, and life is given to man by God. If that is true, then the world and life should be worth the trouble. They should yield something.

But the opposite is true. The Preacher admits this openly and honestly. He is the radically disappointed believer. He is the kind of person who expresses his disap-

problem back to our heedless political and other elites. But he also reminds us that public indifference is at fault.

So the buck stops with you and me too. The shocking revelations in this book are a timely antidote to what professor Bliss describes as "the national penchant for self-delusion, complacency and mediocrity," quoted at the beginning of this article. This is the book to read and ponder by all who are truly concerned about the well-being of this as yet so privileged country.

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pointment openly and honestly. We must not pretend this book is unique in the Bible in this respect and that it has little or no affinity with other parts of Scripture. The Psalms, too, often utter the thought that in the reality of life the promises of God simply do not pan out; in fact, they say that we often experience the opposite of what God has promised. And the prophets too felt this very deeply, especially with regard to Israel. In the light of God's designs we would expect great things from the people of Israel. But are these expectations fulfilled in any way? The whole Old Testament is one continuous complaint about the futility of everything.

This complaint recurs even in the New Testament. Right in the middle of a beautiful, sublime passage like Romans 8, we read several times over that the whole creation sighs, including all mankind, particularly we who have received the Spirit. In fact, it is the Spirit who teaches us to sigh with such unfathomable depth.

So we too may be completely honest and open in our sighing. We may utter these Spirit-taught complaints almost to the point of blasphemy. For it is precisely the Spirit who pushes us back into the world and into temporal life. This world is God's world. It is redeemed by Christ. All this the Spirit teaches us. And because the world is God's world and, above all, because it is redeemed, we may expect something for and from the world. This, too, the Spirit teaches us.

And if things do not pan out this way, then they ... *do not pan out*. This is terribly serious, and then we cannot just ignore it. In the face of such disappointment, we cannot simply stuff the corpse back into the closet of our hearts. We must bring it out into the open.

Such honesty and open-heartedness also belong to the boldness taught us by the Spirit. Seen this way, it becomes more understandable how the book of Ecclesiastes became part of the canon and was accepted as Holy Scripture, as the Word of God. When and how this happened is not known precisely. But perhaps from the beginning these rude complaints about the world and life were understood to have been coaxed from the heart of man by the Spirit himself.



The Preacher by Barry Moser

But then it is especially important that we do not spiritualize these things. The Spirit does not mean them figuratively, but literally. The Spirit is referring simply to the earth and to earthly life. These come from God the Creator and Redeemer. They must, therefore, be delightful. And if we cannot discover this delight in them, then we should not conceal this fact in pretty wrapping paper, but we should say so openly and emphatically.

The Sad thing is that everything participates in the futility of human labor - all of history and all of nature. The generations come and go; but the earth remains. The sun rises and sets. The winds blow endlessly. The rivers run ceaselessly to the sea. It is all unspeakably tiresome. The eye and the ear are never satisfied by it, nor can they ever comprehend it. Yet nothing

new ever happens. Ever and again it is the same. Occasionally it may seem as though something appears. But that's only because we have forgotten the past. Everything that happens has already happened before.

The Preacher, of course, exaggerates outrageously in these statements. But he is obsessed by that one thought: that we never perceive the essential glory of God unambiguously. In his stubborn open-heartedness he generalizes this thought to include all of history and all of nature. And, honestly, can we ever, with the mere fragments we have, demonstrate that which we utter in faith: namely, that life is a good undertaking because it partakes in God's glory? Those who are afraid of the complaints of the Preacher do not yet understand what faith is really all about.

Church

The church and the churches

Dr. Rem Kooistra

The question may well be asked, does it still make sense to talk about the church now that so many people are disappointed in the church as it exists today? For many thousands of people the church is not relevant any more. More than ever, it seems that the church is a thing of the past. We are no longer a church-going people, but rather crowds of church-leavers.

Nevertheless, the number of churches has increased dramatically and is still increasing. At the recent meeting of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, at least 254 churches were registered. It seems that delegates from all these different churches worked happily together, more in a sphere of tolerance than competition. The old claim of being the purest form of the manifestation of the body of Christ seems gone. Instead of the one true church, we now have a plurality of more or less true churches. We see the brokenness of the church over all kinds of issues but don't get too upset about this new phenomenon anymore. We can live in a world with many churches and remain friendly and tolerant.

G.C. Berkouwer, the famous Dutch theologian, begins his study about the church with this sentence, which I translate: "Whoever in our time feels inclined to think about the church, about her reality for faith – credo ecclesiam – finds himself before a long list of questions." (G.C. Berkouwer, *The Church*, 1, p. 5.) This does not sound too encouraging. Let us just look at some of these questions.

One problem, which by now has been with us for nearly 100 years, is that of the multiplicity of existing churches. It is called the pluriformity of the church. We must admit that "pluriformity of the church" is a nice term for talking about the brokenness of the unity of the church. It is actually a way out of our disappointment with the church and the churches as we know and accept this today.

Pluriformity has a number of advantages. First of all, it has an acceptable historical origin. It started in 1054 with the major split

between the Eastern and the Western church, a split which has not healed. Secondly, the word "pluriformity" is free from accusations. It is actually a neutral expression; it does not accuse. Thirdly, it is relatively easy to live with the issue of many churches on the one hand, and with the longing for the one congregation as the undivided body of Christ on the other hand. Only once in my ministry did I meet a colleague, a passionate man, who always struggled with this problem. He sensed deeply that there was something wrong in our church life as we have organized it.

It is so easy, as many of us do, to pray Christ's prayer for the unity of the church. I am sure that in the mind of many clergy the confession of the unity of the church has been kept alive on a low burner – as something on the church calendar which should not be forgotten but also something not too important, something for a special occasion as Reformation Day, October 31.

But I know one church, the Canadian Reformed Church, that really took the issue of the unity of Christ's church very seriously. Following Klaas Schilder's dogmatic line, they maintained that in a particular city or village the church of Christ has only one address. If Jesus were to write a letter to the Canadian churches today, it would be delivered to the minister of the "Canadian Reformed Church."

But this suggestion was in general not very welcome to the other churches. It was called "kerkistisch" or "kerkism" (churchism). The result was even further isolation for the Canadian Reformed Church, which already held itself apart from most of the other churches. Their solution did not solve anything but only increased the confusion.

Berkouwer concludes his reflection on the unity and brokenness of the church with this sentence: "Is some kind of 'synthesis' possible, one which calls us away from the wailing of lamentations about the brokenness to an all-reconciling 'nevertheless'? Or do we face a painful and insoluble paradox



York Cathedral in England built in the early 13th century

here, ... which, even if it does not completely erase our confession 'I believe one holy catholic church', relativizes and obscures this confessional statement in a deeply cutting way?" (p. 32).

How important the confessional statement about the unity of the church is for us also appears from the title of Professor H. Berkhof's *Gods kerk en onze vele kerken* [God's church and our many churches]. According to Berkouwer, this title confronts us with an "enigmatic tension" and not with a dual "reality." A dual reality is impossible when we remember that the expression "God's church cannot refer to something other than the biblical terms such as "God's field" and "God's building are you." Berkhof only wants to stimulate us to more reflection, knowing that we can in no way whatsoever talk about our many churches alongside God's church. Unity is an essential aspect of being the church of Jesus Christ, his body. The brokenness of the church is not just something to be deplored. No, it is a strong "no" that contradicts God's "yes".

The theologian Ph. H. Menoud has pointed out that the expression "one church" is not found in the New Testament, not because the authors were not interested in the unity of the church, but obviously because unity belongs to the essential character of the church.

Karl Barth expressed this by writing that the existence of many churches indicates many masters, many spirits, many "gods". It is scary when we hear ministers and bishops talk about "my" church. It seems that every denomination has a pope. In this way the brokenness of the church tends to become justified (on a small scale). Berkouwer has pointed out that it is so easy to make of the brokenness of the church a placebo, a pain-stiller, that makes us feel better (but does not cure). But in this way many churches no longer see that as a matter of fact there can be only one church. Any plurality is excluded (per definition).

Many believers have tried to find a way to justify the brokenness of the church by suggesting that "sin" too was part of God's plan of salvation, which motivated some of them to accept our sinfulness as God's "necessity". But this contradicts what God has revealed in many places in the Scriptures. There is always the danger that we accept the status quo as normative. We are inclined to forget the biblical directive of being one flock with one shepherd.

That sin is still with us. We must always be on guard lest our imperfections and limitations become an eschatological pillow that puts us to sleep. We know that the church is awake, since Christ called her out of the darkness to the wonderful light. We must always keep in mind Christ's warnings that



Neerlandia's first log church built in 1915

Stewardship

a kingdom that is inwardly divided (divided against itself) will perish and that no city or house that is inwardly divided is able to maintain itself. The sad reality is that the history of the churches shows so much inner division.

When we look at the brokenness of the church and its many schisms, we know for sure that this will be the permanent situation in our times. In this way the unity of the church becomes part of her eschatological expectation. Many attempts of promoting the unity of the church, or churches, have failed. Many churches even show distrust towards the search for unity. It often seemed that the Roman Catholic church was ahead of all other churches even though its unity often was more outward appearance than essential reality. It seems that church unity is just an illusion. The facts speak a different language and contradict the search. We are reminded of Abraham Kuyper's judgement about all kinds of efforts towards church unity, when he states that as long as the unity of the church has not been restored, the power of the Christian life cannot wake up (*Gemene gratie* [Common Grace], vol. 111, p. 40).

We should not forget that in order to justify the existence of many churches many have taken refuge in the old distinction between the visible and the invisible church. To escape the need of creating a permanent dualism, church leaders suggested that the invisible unity of the church, which is already present, though hidden in the world as we know it today, would become apparent in the future.

Having looked at some of these impassable roads, we return to the unity of the church as a matter of evidence and of obvious concern. But immediately we are confronted with the question whether the search for church unity is still a matter of deep concern for the church today since the congregation is called and admonished to be eager to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

In 1 Corinthians 1, where believers identified themselves with either Paul, Apollos, Cephas or ... Christ, Paul asked the strange question: Is Christ divided?

At the end of his chapter on the Church, Berkouwer writes:

"The foundation of the unity of the church is part of the very nature of the church. There is no other possibility thinkable than that of the one flock and the one shepherd listening to the voice of the one shepherd. In this way the shepherd becomes visible in his love for the sheep, which are chased around and tired out like sheep that don't have a shepherd."

May the present situation, as we also consider the international situation, stimulate us to seek church unity with greater zeal.

The debt millstone

Give everyone what you owe him: if you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. Romans 13:7,8

I hate debt. When I owe, the debt presses on me like a millstone would if it were placed around my neck. The apostle Paul advocates only one kind of debt – the "continuing debt to love one another." The financial kind of debt is another story. My colleague, Harry Boessenkool, retired from a long career in the financial service industry, has lots of solid advice on debt some of which he shares with us in this issue. He writes:

We are not aware of a single country that is debt free – Alberta is only a province! Studies are also showing that there are virtually no people in Canada under 55 years of age that are debt free. The greater majority of our businesses are not debt free. Any public corporation that has shares outstanding is not without any obligation. Whether we like it or not, the minute we use a credit card we are incurring at least a temporary debt. It may not attract interest but it is a debt nonetheless.

There seems to be an overwhelming vote of confidence in debt. Sixty percent of Canadians have an RRSP and all these funds are invested in some type of debt instrument.

So what is the problem with debt? The Bible generally speaks negatively about debt – except the debt of love. In Deuteronomy 15 there is a great solution for handling debt, but only for the Israelites. Foreigners still had to pay.

In our communities and the world at large we have had excellent discussions regarding the principles surrounding the "Year of Jubilee" (Lev. 25). At an international level we were able to write off (forgive) some debts of poor countries. At a national level, governments are forced, via guarantees, to pay out (forgive) loans to industry and individuals (student loans). At the local level, financial institutions write off (forgive) loans to individuals, farmers and companies. We have a whole industry that manages our complex and comprehensive bankruptcy laws for individuals and companies that get into debt with no ability to repay.

At a personal level we have a responsibility to manage our debt so we do not become a burden to society. Fundamentally that means living within our means. There is a great debate about what this means, as the Canadian poverty line varies significantly depending on whom you ask. At a practical level let's look at some ways we (those working for regular wages) can avoid excessive debt (the percentages are working "rules of thumb" and may not apply to everyone):

1) Your monthly payments for all personal loans, mortgages plus three percent of the total of your credit card limits generally should not exceed 35 percent of your gross monthly income. If you include Christian School tuition, this can be increased to 37 percent. Once you are over this percentage you can be assured that your debts at the end of the year will be higher than at the beginning.

2) At today's low interest rates the percentages quoted above could lead to enormous debts. When taking on debt (and this should be restricted to homes and vehicles only) it is wise to amortize (the time over which you will repay the loan in total) the loan or mortgage to be paid off before age 55 or 60. And always compute the interest rate at two percent above what you are paying if the rate you are paying is below 10 percent. Vehicles should never be financed over more than five years. In the case of couples with children it is difficult to envision (on average) that one income will suffice. Ideally only 50 percent of the spouse's income should be used to calculate the percentage recommended in 1) above.

3) No budget means no control. Lack of some longer-term goals usually implies that there is no strongly developed savings pattern. Try logging your spending and accounting for

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick DeGraaf

your cash withdrawals over a two month period. If you can not account for half of it, there is a serious problem. The most likely culprit for 'expense creep' is random eating out, Starbucks, Tim Horton's and Dairy Queen. The morning and afternoon lattes cost about \$1800 per year (after taxes you have to earn about \$2,700) or some \$150 per month. Eating out for lunch for half your working days costs \$1,000 per year (after taxes you have to earn about \$1,500) or \$83 per month. We will assume that smoking and drinking are a non-issue. The cost of part-time work for one spouse can have a negative impact once all the costs are factored in. We realize there could be other reasons to seek employment other than economics. Second vehicles are a severe drain on cash resources.

In summary, the debt millstone can be broken with proper management and if debt is kept well within defined boundaries, such as the following:

- Church and kingdom causes need to be budgeted and paid like mortgages or loan payments, automatically deducted from your bank account since they represent the 'first-fruits' that the Lord expects.
- Budgeting, managing your expenses are of vital importance.
- Avoid all impulse purchases. Make lists of what you need.
- Pay your credit cards monthly. Better yet, only use debit cards with no overdraft facility attached. Do not be swayed by low interest rates or delayed payment options.
- Put money aside for major purchases now. The secular notion of paying yourself first needs to be avoided if you have a mortgage or other loans outstanding. By simply making those payments you are already paying yourself first!

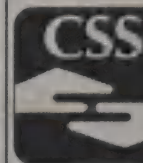
The Canadian tax system treats donation to charities very well. Average income earners can get back thirty or forty cents for every dollar donated. The tax rebate obtained because of those donations can be used to pay down your debts. You can turn 'millstones' into 'milestones'.

Stewardly Tip: New or Used? Really think hard about buying that new car or computer or other expensive purchase – seek out expert advice and buy used instead. Consider using rental cars with unlimited mileage for long driving vacations. Don't be tempted by leasing – someone will profit (leasing arrangements are not charitable).

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly Tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestion and your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask for more details.

Next issue: Intentional Giving: Firstfruits

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario Rick's email: rickd@cssservices.ca



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Opinion

Yes ... but

Bert Hielema

On the vanity of war, credit, consumerism and America

Too bad that we can't start the New Year with a clean slate. All debts paid, all conflicts solved. Alas, reality is different. Bills still come due. Bad feelings keep on lingering. High on my own worry list is Iraq, where an election is imminent. I am afraid that that war's outcome will be worse than Vietnam.

I come to this partly on an assessment by Dr. Martin van Crefeld, professor of history at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, an expert on modern warfare. In one of his books, *The Transformation of War*, he has foreseen the type of conflict now encountered in the Middle East. Dr. van Crefeld bases his findings on the experiences of Moshe Dayan. You may remember him as the soldier with his eye-patch trademark. A brilliant Jewish general and later Israel's foreign minister, he went to Vietnam as a war correspondent.

Before Dayan arrived there, he did some exploratory work: talked to Pentagon people, where his first question was whether they had changed their strategy since first going into Vietnam. He was told that they did not have to do so since everything worked much better than expected. He was assured that the situation was well under control and most of South Vietnam was secure.

Once there, he discovered that no road was safe, even those places that had been most thoroughly "cleansed" and "pacified." Reminds me of that mess hall in Mosul where 18 American soldiers were killed by a suicide bomber.

In Washington he also interviewed the deputy head of the National Security Council, Walt Rostow, who believed that the planned elections in South Vietnam would be free and democratic. They weren't. Will the Iraqi elections? When he had a chat with Robert McNamara, the then secretary of defense – Rumsfeld now has that position – Dayan discovered that he could not explain to Dayan how the Americans intended to end the War.

Sounds all too familiar. Is there an Iraqi exit plan?

Another similarity: Intelligence. Had good Viet Cong intelligence been available, the American enormous superiority in every kind of military hardware would have made it easy to win the Vietnam War. In reality the US air force dropped more than six million tons of bombs which mostly hit empty air or civilians, driving huge segments of the population straight into the arms of the Viet Cong. Sounds like Iraq to me.

Dayan saw clearly that the idea that the Vietnamese people wanted to become Americanized was an illusion. Elections don't generate democracy. Democracy generates elections. As in Vietnam so in Iraq: the vast majority really wants to be left alone and get on with their lives. As in Vietnam, so in Iraq van Crefeld sees a mighty war machine complete with helicopters, air

force, armor, electronic communications, artillery, and mind-boggling riches with tons of ammunition, fuel, spare parts, and equipment.

Contrast this with the North Vietnamese, some of whom walked for four months, carrying a few artillery rounds on their backs and eating a little ground rice from a tin plate. Not unlike the Iraqi insurgents, employing low-tech suicide bombers.

Van Crefeld suggests that an armed force that keeps beating down on weaker opponents will be seen as cruel, and end up losing the support of its allies, its own people, and its own troops. Those who fight against the weak – and the rag-tag Iraqi militias are very weak – and win, they lose just the same. Was taking Fallujah a victory?

As Vietnam and other cases prove, no armed force, however rich, however powerful, however advanced, and however well motivated is immune to this dilemma. The end result of winning is disintegration and ultimate defeat. No wonder the suicide rate among American soldiers is already exceptionally high.

Van Crefeld believes that the present Iraqi occupation will almost certainly end as the Vietnam one did, with the last US troops fleeing the country while hanging on to their helicopters' skids.

Remember the excuses for hanging in there? The USA will never run. Loss of prestige and stature. To leave would mean that those who died in Vietnam had died in vain.

Well, face it, those troops in Vietnam did die in vain, as do most of the men, women and children who die in war. Most wars are unnecessary, waged on the basis of lies, power, and fear. Those bodies lying in flag-draped coffins there didn't die for Peace, or Democracy, or the Good of the Country. Nor do they now. How many more soldiers, women and children are going to die in vain in Iraq to prove that those who died before them didn't die in vain?

Stubborn Bush and even more stubborn Rumsfeld will stay the course in Iraq: pouring in more troops, causing more to die for nothing, wasting more money, now not available for kids or poor, or education, or Darfur.

I also base it on economic grounds. Here is why the aftermath of Iraq will be worse than Vietnam: 30 years ago the world owed billions to the USA. Its budgets were in balance. Cheap oil was plentiful. Now they have soaring deficits. Untold trillions of debt. A devastating Oil Peak at hand. So the US dollar will sink, interest rates soar, the economy tank.

Still, on the micro level, where you and I eke out a living, all this mess fortunately will not affect us fundamentally. The sun will still rise. Spring will return. Summer will come. Love still abounds. There have always been wars, always been stupid poli-

ticians. That's the human lot. I am well into my tenth year, so after more than 200 columns you have an idea where I come from, even though you or I don't quite know where we are going.

What I can predict is that the future ain't what it used to be, something confirmed by Dr. J.R. McNeill, professor of history at Georgetown University in his *Environmental History of the Twentieth century*, aptly named *Something New under the Sun*. The new things are a "gigantic, uncontrolled experiment upon the earth," mostly caused by the enormous surge of our economic activity, and "Climate Change."

How true. We, North American citizens, are obsessed with consumption. Our real religion is "Buy, Buy, Buy." Once upon a time we bought stuff made locally or at least nationally, giving meaningful work to many. Now what we acquire in our temple-malls is not made at home, but almost all in China and the Far East. It used to be – long ago – that we paid cash for what we bought. No money, no deal. Different today is credit: "Charge, Charge, Charge," makes our idolatry possible. Both "Buy" and "Charge" are cruel gods.

"Buy" means we can't miss a day at work. "Charge" means stress. Our compulsive spending not only is unsettling for us – pay a bit here, a bit there, never really enough to come clean – it also plays havoc with international money streams.

This is especially the case in the USA. There the largest lenders, China and Japan, subsidize consumer credit through loaning them more than \$600 billion a year at a low rate. Without these advances, the American people couldn't possibly finance their purchases nor the US government its own huge budget deficit. This two-way arrangement benefits both: without granting credit these Asian countries couldn't sell their wares to American consumers. The unspoken understanding is: "I loan you the money; you buy our stuff." If this were not the case interest rates would rise, making consumption not only more expensive but impossible.

There's nothing wrong with borrowing. We all have done this at one time or another. But if we must take out loans to pay the interest then trouble is not far away. That's what's happening in the USA. We are now on the verge of making true that old proverb: "He that goes a-borrowing, goes a-sorrowing."

By all the rules of international economics, Americans cannot endlessly purchase more than they can pay for. At the same time no country will provide limitless credit to cover the shortfall. What can't go on forever, won't.

Is 2005 the year when this cycle will end? China – the main lender – as a society lives on a knife's edge. The billions of poor resent the millions of rich, often gotten

wealthy by hook and crook. Part of this corruption comes from breathing in dirty air and drinking unclean water. We all are affected by what happens around us: a polluted environment generates polluted minds. I know I cannot predict the future, but there is a law of cause and effect. When consumption drops in America – and it will – it'll pull down other economies, especially China. There unemployment, already high, will create more tension and civic unrest.

Also as the US dollar drops – and it keeps on doing so – at some time the lenders will balk. The USA's debt to foreigners is close to \$5 trillion, double what it was less than six years ago. No other nation owes so much.

America is unique in other ways as well. No other nation has such a huge network of retail outlets. No other nation is as drenched in advertising and product promotion. No wonder it's almost impossible to resist the urge to buy, bombarded as people are unceasingly with pleas, messages, sexy pictures, offering almost free money, no payments for years, no interest ever, promising the possession of the cake and the opportunity to eat it as well.

In earlier times the most gifted of artists painted and composed, erected magnificent structures to worship, beautiful museums to house their treasures and grand halls to listen to their music. Now our high priests are those who can write the most seductive message, can fashion the most appealing – or appalling – picture to induce us to consume more.

In a few days George W. Bush will officially start his second term of four years. By all indications he will push for further tax cuts, so that this disastrous pattern of consumption will continue unabated. He also will seek ways to keep on dismantling as much environmental legislation as possible.

The result?

In the next four years, the American locomotive that has pulled the world economy, will stall, might even crash as its credit is no longer good, interest rates rise and consumers retrench. Even worse the "gigantic, uncontrolled experiment upon the earth," our cultus of consumerism, enormously aided by Bush's classic right-wing "Christian" agenda will speed up the coming of disastrous climate change, the equivalent of a world-wide tsunami.

All this, combined with the Iraqi fiasco will spell the end of Empire America. Who or what will fill the gap?

Bert Hielema has a new e-mail address and a new website created by his son-in-law. E-mail: bert@hielema.ca Website: www.hielema.ca



Opinion/Business Directory

This is no humanitarian crisis – Darfur is a war

Sarah Kenyon Lischer

SWEET BRIAR, VA.— Forced evacuations and mass rapes; brutal ethnic killings and rampaging militias; oil profits and arms sales. The deadly mix of politics, economics, and insecurity has displaced 1.6 million people and killed tens of thousands in the Darfur region of western Sudan since early 2003. The United Nations recently described Darfur as the “world’s worst humanitarian crisis.”

This is not a humanitarian crisis. It is a war. Humanitarian assistance, in the absence of political and military engagement, can actually exacerbate the conflict.

The label “humanitarian crisis” conveniently absolves the rest of the world from taking political and military action in Darfur. By providing generous humanitarian assistance, governments and the UN claim to take meaningful action. But genocide cannot be resolved by donating blankets and food to the potential victims.

A purely humanitarian approach can worsen the war in three ways. First, it obscures the political and strategic importance of refugee populations as potentially destabilizing forces. Second, a humanitarian response empowers militants and fuels a war economy. And last, by dispatching aid workers rather than soldiers and politicians, governments increase the security threats faced by charitable organizations.

The crisis has now spread outside Sudan’s borders and threatens to ignite a regional conflict. An estimated 200,000

Sudanese refugees have escaped from Darfur across the border into Chad. Policymakers and aid organizations lament the miserable situation of these refugees.

In addition to the human misery they embody, the refugees also have the potential to spread the conflict further. Refugees present a political obstacle to the Sudanese government and a political opportunity to the rebel forces. The mere presence of the refugees represents a potent indictment of the Sudanese regime. In response to the perceived threat, Sudanese forces have raided the refugee camps and nearby Chadian villages. If sufficiently provoked by cross-border attacks, Chad could enter the conflict. An international war will be even harder to resolve and contain than the current civil war.

The UN has broadcast desperate appeals for increased funding for basic necessities – such as tents, food, and medical care. It should also appeal for improved border security to prevent the spread of war.

Humanitarian assistance empowers the combatants when they control aid distribution. The combatants – both the Khartoum government and rebel forces – have used humanitarian assistance as a bargaining chip. The Sudanese Army and police have repeatedly raided camps for internally displaced civilians, brutally dispersing the residents. This prevents aid organizations from providing assistance – and from documenting human rights abuses committed during the raids.

Rebel groups in Darfur also routinely prevent humanitarian organizations from accessing desperate civilians. In some cases, rebels have detained aid workers until they met their captors’ demands for more access to aid resources. Rebels also routinely loot relief supplies including fuel, medicine, and food. Control over the displaced people, and the aid meant to sustain them, has become an essential weapon in the conflict.

Cease-fire violations have made much of the Darfur region unsafe for aid deliveries. In December, two employees of Save the Children died when attackers deliberately targeted a clearly marked convoy of humanitarian aid vehicles. The charity Doctors without Borders also lost two staff members to violence in the past three months. As security conditions worsen, more and more aid agencies have withdrawn from the war zone.

The international response has been paltry. The UN Security Council called on the Sudanese government to disarm the militias and protect aid deliveries. But the weakly worded resolution lacked enforcement mechanisms to back up those demands. The UN General Assembly collectively avoided responsibility by refusing to vote on a measure that condemned human rights abuses in Sudan. The 1,000 African Union troops presently in Darfur do not have a mandate to use force to protect civilians. They are meant to deter war crimes simply by their presence.

Despite their official neutrality in the con-

flict, it is the humanitarian groups that are pressing for greater political and military action. Oxfam condemned recent Security Council resolutions as tepid responses. In retaliation, Khartoum expelled Oxfam’s country director. InterAction, the American nongovernmental organization clearinghouse, implored President Bush to provide funding and support for the African Union mission.

The only point that all parties agree on is that civilians are suffering in Darfur. Therefore, as a compromise measure, the international community has deployed humanitarian organizations to fill the political and military policy vacuum. Unfortunately, treating the war purely as a humanitarian disaster only fuels the conflict.

• Sarah Kenyon Lischer is a professor of government at Sweet Briar College. Her new book, *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War, and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid*, will be published in February.

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Classifieds



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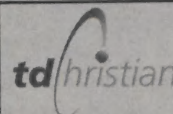
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Susan Droog, Director of Human Resources, Dordt College

498 Fourth Ave NE, Sioux Center IA 51250

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Ft. McMurray - CJOK	8:30 am	1230
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Westlock - CFOK	7:30 am	1370

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Digby - CKDY	6:00 am	1420
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Kentville - CKEN	8:30 am	1490
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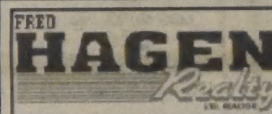
Bridgewater CKBW	1000 AM	Sun. 5:30 am
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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Items appearing in this column are run free of charge if they advertise an admission-free event, if they accompany an ad for the same event, or at the discretion of CC.

In case of free listing, space limitations apply.

The charge otherwise is \$7.50 per line, or \$1.50 per 1/3 line, per insertion

- Jan 30** Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. H. DeBolster will be preaching.
- Mar 18, 19** The **Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group** presents "DE RUIGE RITSELAARS" Een Klucht in 4 bedrijven door Hub Fober. **Woodstock**, Market Centre Theatre: Friday at 8pm & Saturday at 2pm and 8pm. See ad p.22
- Apr 8** The **Woodstock Dutch Theatre Group** presents "DE RUIGE RITSELAARS", Een Klucht in 4 bedrijven door Hub Fober, at the Christian Heritage School, **Jordan** at 8pm. See ad p. 22 for ticket information.
- Apr 9** **Concert of Sacred Music** by **St. Thomas Crescendo Male Choir** 7:30 p.m. **Bethel** CRC, 716 Classic Drive, **London** (Freewill offering) Info: (519) 637-4357
- May 1** **Concert of Sacred Music** by **St. Thomas Crescendo Male Choir** 7:30 p.m. **Knox** Presbyterian Church, 55 Hincks Street, **St. Thomas** (Freewill offering) Info: (519) 637-4357
- May 7** **Liberation Choir 60th Anniversary Concert**, with the Guelph Symphony Orchestra, 7:30 at **Hamilton** Place. Tickets: \$20, \$30, \$40. Available from choir members/ box office/ www.organs.ca
- July 1-3** **Nobleford CRC** 100 year anniversary celebrations with picnic, banquet and services. For more information contact Bert/Pat Konynenbelt at (403)824-3442 or by e-mail at bpkbel@telus.net (see ad this issue)

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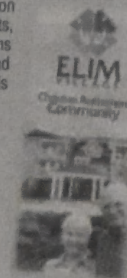


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News

Paradise lost – Sri Lanka's wave of destruction



Sri Lankan child amid debris of his home

Chris Pullanayagam

If I listened carefully, I could hear the waves as they crashed on the rocks. I grew up by the ocean watching orange sunsets and the waves as they would hiss and foam and then disappear as quickly as they had formed. Occasionally the rhythm of the ocean would be disturbed by a sea gull diving into the water or a catamaran (small fishing boat) gliding across its surface. This was where I went when I needed tranquility; my piece of heaven and a glimpse of eternity.

Sri Lanka is a tiny island (slightly smaller than Lake Ontario) at the southern tip of the Indian sub-continent. Described as "Paradise Isle" and the "Pearl of the Indian Ocean," Ceylon as it used to be named, was indeed that to those who inhabited the island and those who visited. To many who live by the ocean, the sea is regarded with respect and awe, a sustainer of life. The island is protected by a coral reef that runs around it about half a kilometer away from its shore. To many of the 19 million who inhabit the island, the ocean is their only means of livelihood. To conquering nations it has been the only means of access, making the island, by virtue of its strategic location, a constant target for occupation by the Portuguese, Dutch and the British over the past 500 years. Sri Lanka finally gained independence in 1948.

A war against terrorists since

1983 has ravaged this otherwise peaceful nation costing 60,000 lives. With an albeit shaky ceasefire now in place for the past two years, many expected that the nation would never see so many lives lost again – that is not until the Tsunami hit. It came out of a clear blue sky. No warning, no storm and no noise, not until the placid coastal waters got sucked into the sea until it exposed the reef and then came back as the huge wave struck like a coiled cobra. Not one, but many, over and over again, each time taking back bodies, concrete, vehicles and debris. The death toll so far stands at around 31,000 in Sri Lanka alone. Most of these are poor fisher folk and those who live in cheaper housing by the seashore. The event itself is now history but the devastation that followed the walls of water that hit the country's eastern and southwestern shores will be felt for years to come.

As the huge waves kept pounding the coast with indiscriminate recklessness, property and equipment losses rose to billions of dollars. To help the reader get a sense of the magnitude of the tsunami that hit the island, try imagining what it would take to overturn a VIA rail train packed with 1200 people (engine and twelve compartments), drag two compartments out to sea, and twist the tracks so they are left standing upright. And this was on the west coast, which was on the other side of the island that was in the direct

path of the Tsunami.

Then there is the human loss that cannot be assessed: loss of life and hope. Millions are displaced and without homes. Fishermen who once felt part of the sea are scared to even look at it again. Widows and orphans stare vacantly at relief workers as they try to come to terms with so great a tragedy. Stories abound. Sad stories, stories of courage and valour, of miracles and sacrifice, human endurance and suffering.

One missionary pastor on the east coast in charge of an orphanage tried rebuking the waves when he saw them coming and then had the divine presence of mind to ride the motor boat, into which he had loaded the children, into the wave thus saving all their lives. In Indonesia a fisherman was found alive after being pinned under his boat for seven days. I heard a story of parents who let go a tree to save their infant but were sucked instead into the greedy currents. And then there are accounts of the worst kind; of single parents having to bury their spouse and children and of little children who have yet to come to terms with the loss of their entire family.

Mother nature has a story of her own too. There were hardly any animals drowned in spite of the largest animal sanctuary being hit by these massive waves and over 200 people and two hotels in the area being totally decimated by their force. Observers recount

scenes of animals leaving for the interior two days before the waves hit. Perhaps we have missed and are out of tune with nature's early warning systems, in our pursuit of and preoccupation with technology.

Catastrophic events such as these do cause people to stop and think, even for a moment. I certainly did as I recall how I walked that same shore just a month ago and watched the fishermen bringing their nets ashore after a long night out at sea. I reflect on how frail we are and how God must weep at our unwillingness to listen and accept his purpose for our lives.

The challenges of dealing with disease, trauma, reconstruction and rehabilitation in Sri Lanka and other Tsunami ravaged countries are staggering. Already poor, these nations have little resource to respond to crisis such as these. I'm awed by the continuous and unanimous response of people around the world and hope that this tragedy will in some way help to bring the world a little closer. I'm hoping paradise will be regained.

Chris Pullanayagam immigrated to Canada with his family from Sri Lanka in 2001. He worships at Friendship CRC and works as a refugee policy analyst at Citizens for Public Justice in Toronto.

Tsunami challenges churches and beliefs in Sri Lanka

Rainer Lang Galle

Sri Lanka (ENI) – The work of a pastor is never easy. After disaster struck countries within the Indian Ocean rim on December 26 the work of priests and pastors has been unending, as they tend to millions of people in the region left traumatized in deep shock.

Since the tsunami dumped thousands of tons of water on her community, sweeping away everything in its path, 17-year-old Lilly Theresa in the town of Trincomalee on Sri Lanka's east coast has not been able to talk. She lost four of her brothers and two of her sisters.

The Rev. Terrance Sylvester is taking care of her. The Methodist pastor is coordinating the relief work of members of the Action by Churches Together (ACT) global aid alliance and local members of the National Christian Council in an area where half a dozen villages were washed out completely. From his church alone 24 members died, more than half of them children.

Some 31,000 people in Sri Lanka out of a population of 20 million are known to have died in the tragedy.

In Galle, Padmal Widana-gamage, who survived a train accident, sought consolation with his neighbor, Methodist pastor Kingsley Weerasinghe.

"The pastor has always helped me," the 26-year-old Buddhist said. Widanagamage lost his sister, aunt and uncle in the train accident. With all his memories, Widana-gamage cannot stand being alone. And he is unable to even distract himself by working, as he cannot get to the garment factory near Colombo where he worked.

For the general secretary of the National Christian Council (NCC) of Sri Lanka, Jayasiri Peiris, it is important "to listen to the people who are in a state of trauma."

Peiris, an Anglican priest, warns that the spiritual dimension of the churches' work should not be forgotten. Besides seeking new employment opportunities for people and rebuilding communities, churches need to offer trauma counseling, he believes.

Says Peiris: "We have to offer the people solidarity. The NCC should not become just an NGO [non-governmental organization]."

The national church leader wants to take advantage of the situation that has drawn government, religions and civil society to work closely together, in a country which has experienced years of civil war between the minority Tamil community and the majority Buddhist Sinhalese.

An example of this kind of solidarity he sees in the fact that Buddhist monks went to the eastern province where Tamils live to clean the hospital there. "To end tribalism is a way forward," he says.

Peiris has also appealed to the churches to "act wisely." When people see that there is no hidden agenda to churches' relief work, their attitude towards Christians will change, Peiris said.